ARMADALE

By

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ARMADALE

PROLOGUE

ALLAN ARMADALE'S CONFESSION

In the principal inn at Wildbad in Germany, a man was dying of a stroke. "You must go to him," the little German doctor said to Mr. Neal, also staying at the inn. "He has some writing for you to do. You are his countryman—go!"

And Mr. Neal, that stolid Scot, went to the deathroom, and gazed with pity on the darkly beautiful face of Mrs. Armadale, wife of the dying man, at young Allan Armadale, tumbling about on the bed of his dying father. "You wish me to write something for you?"

"Yes!" said the dying man. "My hand is gone; my speech is going. Write!"

The wife left the room at her husband's command, and Mr. Neal went to a desk, and took from it an unfinished letter to—the dying man's son! Feebly Armadale commanded him to read the letter aloud.

"I am the only son of Mathew Wrentmore of Barbadoes," Neal read. "When I was twenty-one Allan Armadale of England, a cousin of my mother's, offered to make me heir to his vast West Indian property, on condition that I take his name. This good fortune was due to the misconduct of his own son, Allan, who had disgraced himself and left home an outlaw.

"I agreed to take the name of Armadale, and shortly afterwards, when the old man died, became the richest man in Barbadoes.

"Then Fergus Ingleby became a clerk in the office of the estate. He was a young man of my own age, and we were soon firm friends, though my mother did not like him. She wrote to an old friend and admirer of hers, the late Stephen Blanchard of England, and inquired about his daughter, hinting at a marriage between our two families. Blanchard's reply came from Madeira, where he was resting after an ill-

ness, and the letter inclosed a photograph of his daughter: I fell in love at once with the photograph, and made arrangements to leave Barbadoes as soon as possible.

"But I fell ill very mysteriously, and when I had recovered I discovered that Fergus Ingleby—who had seen the photograph of Blanchard's daughter—had disappeared! And when I reached Madeira I found that he had gone there, after taking the name of Armadale. Worse—he had married Miss Blanchard! She had fallen madly in love with him, and though she knew his real identity, had agreed to deceive her father. They had been helped in this deceit by a young servant girl, a girl of twelve Miss Blanchard had befriended in England, who had forged a note, purporting to come from my mother, giving her approval of the marriage.

"The happy pair sailed from Madeira on *La Grace de Dieu* —but I sailed with them, unknown! And when a gale sprang up, and the boat was being abandoned, I managed to lock the man who had cheated me in the flooded cabin, and there he was found, drowned like a dog!

"I have since discovered that he was the real Allan Armadale, who had travelled to the Barbadoes to ruin me. I have also discovered that his wife bore him a son in England. And now I have a son—once more there are two Allan Armadales in the world!"

At those lines the writing ended. There, the stroke had struck him, and the pen had dropped from his hand.

He knew the place; he remembered the words. At the instant when the reader's voice stopped, he looked eagerly at the doctor. "I have got what comes next in my mind," he said, with slower and slower articulation. "Help me to speak it."

The doctor administered a stimulant, and signed to Mr. Neal to give him time. After a little delay, the flame of the sinking spirit leapt up in his eyes once more. Resol struggling with his failing speech, he summoned the S man to take the pen; and pronounced the closing sentences of the narrative, as his memory gave them back to him, one by one, in these words:—

"Despise my dying conviction, if you will—but grant me, I solemnly implore you, one last request. My son! the only hope I have left for you, hangs on a Great Doubt—the doubt whether we are, or are not, the masters of our own destinies. It may be, that mortal freewill can conquer mortal fate; and that going, as we all do, inevitably to death, we go inevitably to nothing that is before death. If this be so, indeed, respect

—though you respect nothing else—the warning which I give you from my grave. Never, to your dying day, let any living soul approach you who is associated, directly or indirectly, with the crime which your father has committed. Avoid the widow of the man I killed—if the widow still lives. Avoid the maid whose wicked hand smoothed the way to the marriage—if the maid is still in her service. And more than all, avoid the man who bears the same name as your own. Offend your best benefactor, if that benefactor's influence has connected you one with the other. Desert the woman who loves you, if that woman is a link between you and him. Hide yourself from him under an assumed name. Put the mountains and the seas between you; be ungrateful, be unforgiving; be all that is most repellent to your own gentler nature, rather than live under the same roof, and breathe the same air with that man. Never let the two Allan Armadales meet in this world: never, never, never!

"There lies the way by which you may escape—if any way there be. Take it, if you prize your own innocence and your own happiness, through all your life to come!

"I have done. If I could have trusted any weaker influence than the influence of this confession to incline you to my will, I would have spared you the disclosure which these pages contain. You are lying on my breast, sleeping the innocent sleep of a child, while a stranger's hand writes these words for you as they fall from my lips. Think what the strength of my conviction must be, when I can find the courage, on my death-bed, to darken all your young life at its outset with the shadow of your father's crime. Think—and be warned. Think—and forgive me if you can."

There it ended. Those were the father's last words to the son.

Inexorably faithful to his forced duty, Mr. Neal laid aside the pen, and read over aloud the lines he had just written. "Is there more to add?" he asked, with his pitilessly steady voice. There was no more to add.

Mr. Neal folded the manuscript, enclosed it in a sheet of paper, and sealed it with Mr. Armadale's own seal. "The address?" he said, with his merciless business formality. "To Allan Armadale, junior," he wrote, as the words were dictated from the bed. "Care of Godfrey Hammick, Esq., Offices of Messrs. Hammick and Ridge, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London." Having written the address, he waited, and considered for a moment. "Is your executor to open this?" he asked.

"No! he is to give it to my son, when my son is of an age to understand it."

"In that case," pursued Mr. Neal, with all his wits in remorseless working order, "I will add a dated note to the address, repeating your own words as you have just spoken them, and explaining the circumstances under which my handwriting appears on the document." He wrote the note in the briefest and plainest terms—read it over aloud as he had read over what went before—signed his name and address at end, and made the doctor sign next, as witness of the proceedings, and as medical evidence of the condition in which Mr. Armadale then lay. This done, he placed the letter in a second enclosure, sealed it as before, and directed it to Mr. Hammick, with the superscription of "private", added to the address.

"Do you insist on my posting this?" he asked, rising with the letter in his hand.

"Give him time to think," said the doctor. "For the child's sake give him time to think! A minute may change him."

"I will give him five minutes," answered Mr. Neal, placing his watch on the table, implacably just to the very last.

They waited, both looking attentively at Mr. Armadale. The signs of change which had appeared in him already, were multiplying fast. The movement which continued mental agitation had communicated to the muscles of his face, was beginning, under the same dangerous influence, to spread downwards. His once helpless hands lay still no longer; they struggled pitiably on the bed-clothes. At sight of that warning token the doctor turned with a gesture of alarm, and beckoned Mr. Neal to come nearer. "Put the question at once," he said; "if you let the five minutes pass, you may be too late."

Mr. Neal approached the bed. He, too, noticed the movement of the hands. "Is that a bad sign?" he asked.

The doctor bent his head gravely. "Put your question at once," he repeated, "or you may be too late."

Mr. Neal held the letter before the eyes of the dying man. "Do you know what this is?"

"My letter."

"Do you insist on my posting it?"

He mastered his failing speech for the last time, and gave the answer.

"Yes!"

Mr. Neal moved to the door with the letter in his hand.

The German followed him a few steps, opened his lips to plead for a longer delay, met the Scotchman's inexorable eye, and drew back again in silence. The door closed and parted them, without a word having passed on either side.

The doctor went back to the bed, and whispered to the sinking man, "Let me call him back; there is time to stop him yet!" It was useless. No answer came: nothing showed that he heeded, or even heard. His eyes wandered from the child, rested for a moment on his own struggling hand, and looked up entreatingly in the compassionate face that bent over him. The doctor lifted the hand—paused—followed the father's longing eyes back to the child—and, interpreting his last wish, moved the hand gently towards the boy's head. The hand touched it, and trembled violently. In another instant the trembling seized on the arm, and spread over the whole upper part of the body. The face turned from pale to red; from red to purple; from purple to pale again. Then the toiling hands lay still, and the shifting colour changed no more.

The window of the next room was open, when the doctor entered it from the death-chamber, with the child in his arms. He looked out as he passed by, and saw Mr. Neal in the street below, slowly returning to the inn.

"Where is the letter?" he asked.

Three words sufficed for the Scotchman's answer:

"In the post."

THE END OF THE PROLOGUE.

THE STORY

BOOK THE FIRST

CHAPTER I

OZIAS MIDWINTER

The wife of the murdered man settled in a little fishing village in Somersetshire, under the care and friendship of the Reverend Decimus Brock. There her son Allan grew up, a lad with one passion—boats.

He had one friend, a young man of his own age, Ozias Midwinter, an ex-usher, who had been found in a field by some labourers, suffering from brain-fever. Allan had taken care of him from the very start, and they would have become inseparable if the rector hadn't stepped in, and asked Midwinter to go away. It was a blow to the strange young man, but he had obeyed, and had taken up a position in London.

Allan's mother died when he was twenty-one. There was nothing remarkable about her death except that it occurred very shortly after a visit paid to her by a mysterious lady—a veiled lady who wore a red Paisley shawl. And then, to Allan's great surprise, he inherited the Blanchard fortune, and the house at Thorpe-Ambrose. By a series of accidents, his uncle and two cousins had been killed.

This was the strange story of the three deaths:

At the time when Mr. Brock had written to Mrs. Armadale's relatives to announce the news of her decease (that is to say, in the middle of the month of January), the family at Thorpe-Ambrose numbered five persons—Arthur Blanchard (in possession of the estate), living in the great house with his mother; and Henry Blanchard, the uncle, living in the neighbourhood, a widower with two children, a son and a daughter. To cement the family connection still more closely, Arthur Blanchard was engaged to be married to his cousin. The wedding was to be celebrated with great local rejoicings, in the coming summer, when the young lady had completed her twentieth year.

The month of February had brought changes with it in the family position. Observing signs of delicacy in the health of his son, Mr. Henry Blanchard left Norfolk, taking the young

man with him, under medical advice, to try the climate of Italy. Early in the ensuing month of March, Arthur Blanchard also left Thorpe-Ambrose, for a few days only, on business which required his presence in London. The business took him into the city. Annoyed by the endless impediments in the streets, he returned westward by one of the river steamers; and, so returning, met his death.

As the steamer left the wharf, he noticed a woman near him who had shown a singular hesitation in embarking, and who had been the last of the passengers to take her place in the vessel. She was neatly dressed in black silk, with a red Paisley shawl over her shoulders, and she kept her face hidden behind a thick veil. Arthur Blanchard was struck by the rare grace and elegance of her figure, and he felt a young man's passing curiosity to see her face. She neither lifted her veil, nor turned her head his way. After taking a few steps hesitatingly backwards and forwards on the deck, she walked away on a sudden to the stern of the vessel. In a minute more, there was a cry of alarm from the man at the helm, and the engines were stopped immediately. The woman had thrown herself overboard.

The passengers all rushed to the side of the vessel to look. Arthur Blanchard alone, without an instant's hesitation, jumped into the river. He was an excellent swimmer, and he reached the woman as she rose again to the surface, after sinking for the first time. Help was at hand; and they were both brought safely ashore. The woman was taken to the nearest police-station, and was soon restored to her senses; her preserver giving his name and address, as usual in such cases, to the inspector on duty, who wisely recommended him to get into a warm bath, and to send to his lodgings for dry clothes. Arthur Blanchard, who had never known an hour's illness since he was a child, laughed at the caution, and went back in a cab. The next day, he was too ill to attend the examination before the magistrate. A fortnight afterwards, he was a dead man.

The news of the calamity reached Henry Blanchard and his son at Milan; and within an hour of the time when they received it, they were on their way back to England. The snow on the Alps had loosened earlier than usual that year, and the passes were notoriously dangerous. The father and son, travelling in their own carriage, were met on the mountain by the mail returning, after sending the letters on by hand. Warnings which would have produced their effect, under any ordinary circumstances, were now vainly addressed to the two

Englishmen. Their impatience to be at home again, after the catastrophe which had befallen their family, brooked no delay. Bribes, lavishly offered to the postillions, tempted them to go on. The carriage pursued its way, and was lost to view in the mist. When it was seen again, it was disinterred from the bottom of a precipice—the men, the horses, and the vehicle all crushed together under the wreck and ruin of an avalanche.

So the three lives were mown down by death. So, in a clear sequence of events, a woman's suicide-leap into a river had opened to Allan Armadale the succession to the Thorpe-Ambrose estates.

Who was the woman? The man who saved her life never knew. The magistrate who remanded her, the chaplain who exhorted her, the reporter who exhibited her in print—never knew. It was recorded of her with surprise, that, though most respectably dressed, she had nevertheless described herself as being "in distress." She had expressed the deepest contrition, but had persisted in giving a name which was on the face of it a false one; in telling a commonplace story, which was manifestly an invention; and in refusing to the last to furnish any clue to her friends. A lady connected with a charitable institution ("interested by her extreme elegance and beauty") had volunteered to take charge of her, and to bring her into a better frame of mind. The first day's experience of the penitent had been far from cheering, and the second day's experience had been conclusive. She had left the institution by stealth; and—though the visiting clergyman, taking a special interest in the case, had caused special efforts to be made—all search after her, from that time forth, had proved fruitless.

While this useless investigation (undertaken at Allan's express desire) was in progress, the lawyers had settled the preliminary formalities connected with the succession to the property. All that remained was for the new master of Thorpe-Ambrose to decide when he would personally establish himself on the estate of which he was now the legal possessor.

Left necessarily to his own guidance in this matter, Allan settled it for himself in his usual hot-headed generous way. He positively declined to take possession, until Mrs. Blanchard and her niece (who had been permitted, thus far, as a matter of courtesy, to remain in their old home) had recovered from the calamity that had befallen them, and were fit to decide for themselves what their future proceedings should be. A

private correspondence followed this resolution, comprehending, on Allan's side, unlimited offers of everything he had to give (in a house which he had not yet seen); and, on the ladies' side, a discreetly reluctant readiness to profit by the young gentleman's generosity in the matter of time. To the astonishment of his legal advisers, Allan entered their office one morning, accompanied by Mr. Brock; and announced, with perfect composure, that the ladies had been good enough to take his own arrangements off his hands, and that, in deference to their convenience, he meant to defer establishing himself at Thorpe-Ambrose till that day two months. The lawyers stared at Allan—and Allan, returning the compliment, stared at the lawyers.

"What on earth are you wondering at, gentlemen?" he inquired, with a boyish bewilderment in his good-humoured blue eyes. "Why shouldn't I give the ladies their two months, if the ladies want them? Let the poor things take their own time, and welcome. My rights? and my position? Oh, pooh! pooh! I'm in no hurry to be squire of the parish—it's not in my way. What do I mean to do for the two months? What I should have done anyhow, whether the ladies had stayed or not; I mean to go cruising at sea. That's what *I* like! I've got a new yacht at home in Somersetshire—a yacht of my own building."

With those words, the new possessor of eight thousand a year dashed into the head-clerk's office, and invited that functionary to a cruise on the high seas, with a smack on the shoulder which was heard distinctly by his masters in the next room. The Firm looked in interrogative wonder at Mr. Brock. A client who could see a position among the landed gentry of England waiting for him, without being in a hurry to occupy it at the earliest possible opportunity, was a client of whom they possessed no previous experience.

"He must have been very oddly brought up," said the lawyers to the rector.

"Very oddly," said the rector to the lawyers.

The change in Allan's future prospects had worked no corresponding alteration in his perverse fancy for Ozias Midwinter, the castaway at the village inn. In the midst of the consultations with the lawyers he had found time to visit him; and on the journey back with the rector, Mr. Brock, there was Allan's friend in the carriage, returning with them to Somersetshire by Allan's own invitation.

The ex-usher's hair had grown again on his shaven skull, and his dress showed the renovating influence of an accession

of pecuniary means; but in all other respects the man was unchanged. He met Mr. Brock's distrust with the old uncomplaining resignation to it; he maintained the same suspicious silence on the subject of his relatives and his early life; he spoke of Allan's kindness to him with the same undisciplined fervour of gratitude and surprise.

The days passed; the yacht was rigged, and fitted for sea; a cruise was arranged to the Welsh coast—and Midwinter the Secret was the same Midwinter still. Confinement on board a little vessel of five-and-thirty tons, offered no great attraction to a man of Mr. Brock's time of life. But he sailed on the trial trip of the yacht nevertheless, rather than trust Allan alone with his new friend.

Would the close companionship of the three on their cruise, tempt the man into talking of his own affairs? No; he was ready enough on other subjects, especially if Allan led the way to them. But not a word escaped him about himself. Mr. Brock tried him with questions about his recent inheritance, and was answered as he had been answered once already at the Somersetshire inn. It was a curious coincidence, Midwinter admitted, that Mr. Armadale's prospects and his own prospects, should both have unexpectedly changed for the better about the same time. But there the resemblance ended. It was no large fortune that had fallen into his lap, though it was enough for his wants. It had not reconciled him with his relations, for the money had not come to him as a matter of kindness but as a matter of right. As for the circumstance which had led to his communicating with his family, it was not worth mentioning—seeing that the temporary renewal of intercourse which had followed, had produced no friendly results. Nothing had come of it but the money—and, with the money, an anxiety which troubled him sometimes, when he woke in the small hours of the morning.

At those last words he became suddenly silent, as if, for once, his well-guarded tongue had betrayed him.

Mr. Brock seized the opportunity, and bluntly asked him what the nature of the anxiety might be. Did it relate to money? No—it related to a Letter which had been waiting for him for many years. Had he received the letter? Not yet; it had been left under charge of one of the partners in the firm which had managed the business of his inheritance for him; the partner had been absent from England; and the letter, locked up among his own private papers, could not be got at till he returned. He was expected back towards the latter part of that present May, and if Midwinter could be

sure where the cruise would take them to at the close of the month, he thought he would write and have the letter forwarded. Had he any family reasons to be anxious about it? None that he knew of; he was curious to see what had been waiting for him for many years, and that was all. So he answered the rector's questions, with his tawny face turned away over the low bulwark of the yacht, and his fishing-line dragging in his supple brown hands.

Favoured by wind and weather, the little vessel had done wonders on her trial-trip. Before the period fixed for the duration of the cruise had half expired, the yacht was as high up on the Welsh coast as Holyhead; and Allan, eager for adventure in unknown regions, had declared boldly for an extension of the voyage northwards to the Isle of Man. By that night's post he wrote to Allan's lawyers and to his own rectory, indicating Douglas in the Isle of Man as the next address to which letters might be forwarded. At the post office, he met Midwinter, who had just dropped a letter into the box. Remembering what he had said on board the yacht, Mr. Brock concluded that they had both taken the same precaution, and had ordered their correspondence to be forwarded to the same place.

Late the next day, they set sail for the Isle of Man.

For a few hours all went well; but sunset brought with it the signs of a coming change. With the darkness, the wind rose to a gale; and the question whether Allan and his journeymen had, or had not, built a stout sea-boat was seriously tested for the first time. All that night, after trying vainly to bear up for Holyhead, the little vessel kept the sea, and stood her trial bravely. The next morning, the Isle of Man was in view, and the yacht was safe at Castletown. A survey by daylight of hull and rigging showed that all the damage done might be set right again in a week's time. The cruising party had accordingly remained at Castletown; Allan being occupied in superintending the repairs, Mr. Brock in exploring the neighbourhood, and Midwinter in making daily pilgrimages on foot, to Douglas and back, to inquire for letters.

The first of the cruising party who received a letter was Allan. "More worries from those everlasting lawyers," was all he said, when he had read the letter, and had crumpled it up in his pocket. The rector's turn came next, before the week's sojourn at Castletown had expired. On the fifth day, he found a letter from Somersetshire waiting for him at the hotel. It had been brought there by Midwinter, and it contained news which entirely overthrew all Mr. Brock's holiday

plans. The clergyman who had undertaken to do duty for him in his absence had been unexpectedly summoned home again; and Mr. Brock had no choice but to cross the next morning from Douglas to Liverpool, and get back by railway on Saturday night, in time for Sunday's service.

Having read his letter, and resigned himself to his altered circumstances as patiently as he might, the rector passed next to a question that pressed for serious consideration in its turn. Burdened with his heavy responsibility towards Allan, and conscious of his own undiminished distrust of Allan's new friend, how was he to act in the emergency that now beset him, towards the two young men who had been his companions on the cruise?

In despair of obtaining any better means of enlightenment to guide his decision, Mr. Brock reverted to the impression which Midwinter had produced on his own mind in the familiarity of the cruise.

Young as he was, the ex-usher had evidently lived a varied life. He could speak of books like a man who had really enjoyed them; he could take his turn at the helm like a sailor who knew his duty; he could cook, and climb the rigging, and lay the cloth for dinner, with an odd delight in the exhibition of his own dexterity. But down to the very last moment of the rector's experience of him—down to that present Friday night—his conduct had been persistently secret and unaccountable to the very last. After bringing Mr. Brock's letter to the hotel, he had mysteriously disappeared from the house without leaving any message for his companions, and without letting anybody see whether he had, or had not, received a letter himself. At nightfall, he had come back stealthily in the darkness—had been caught on the stairs by Allan, eager to tell him of the change in the rector's plans—had listened to the news without a word of remark—and had ended by sullenly locking himself into his own room. What was there in his favour to set against such revelations of his character as these—against his wandering eyes, his obstinate reserve with the rector, his ominous silence on the subject of family and friends? Little or nothing: the sum of all his merits began and ended with his gratitude to Allan.

Mr. Brock left his seat on the side of the bed, trimmed his candle, and, still lost in his own thoughts, looked out absently at the night. The change of place brought no new ideas with it.

"If I only had a friend to apply to!" thought he. "If I

could only find some one to help me in this miserable place!"

At the moment when the aspiration crossed his mind, it was suddenly answered by a low knock at the door; and a voice said softly in the passage outside: "Let me come in."

After an instant's pause to steady his nerves, Mr. Brock opened the door, and found himself, at one o'clock in the morning, standing face to face on the threshold of his own bedroom with Ozias Midwinter.

"Are you ill?" asked the rector, as soon as his astonishment would allow him to speak.

"I have come here to make a clean breast of it!" was the strange answer. "Will you let me in?"

With those words he walked into the room—his eyes on the ground, his lips ashy pale, and his hand holding something hidden behind him.

"I saw the light under your door," he went on, without looking up, and without moving his hand; "and I know the trouble on your mind which is keeping you from your rest. You are going away to-morrow morning, and you don't like leaving Mr. Armadale alone with a stranger like me."

Startled as he was, Mr. Brock saw the serious necessity of being plain with a man, who had come at that time, and had said those words to him.

"You have guessed right," he answered. "I stand in the place of a father to Allan Armadale, and I am naturally unwilling to leave him, at his age, with a man whom I don't know."

Ozias Midwinter took a step forward to the table. His wandering eyes rested on the rector's New Testament, which was one of the objects lying on it.

"You have read that Book, in the years of a long life, to many congregations," he said. "Has it taught you mercy to your miserable fellow-creatures?"

Without waiting to be answered, he looked Mr. Brock in the face for the first time, and brought his hidden hand slowly into view.

"Read that," he said; "and, for Christ's sake, pity me when you know who I am."

He laid a letter on the table. It was the letter that Mr. Neal had posted at Wildbad nineteen years since.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN REVEALED

When Mr. Brock at last put down the letter, Midwinter began his story in a low voice. He told how his mother had married again, how he had run away from home, how he had been picked up by Ozias Midwinter, gypsy and thief, who travelled around the country with performing dogs. When the man died in a drunken bout, Armadale had taken his name. After that he had been ship's boy, a servant in a great house, a bookseller's apprentice—anything that came his way, that kept him from starvation. He had, lastly, been an usher in a school, but he had lost this position when the strange brain-fever had come upon him.

"My father's confession has told you who I am; and my own confession has told you what my life has been," he ended, without taking the chair to which the rector pointed. "I promised to make a clean breast of it when I first asked leave to enter this room. Have I kept my word?"

"It is impossible to doubt it," replied Mr. Brock. "You have established your claim on my confidence and my sympathy."

"Thank you, sir," said Midwinter, simply and gravely.

He sat down opposite Mr. Brock at the table.

"In a few hours you will have left this place," he proceeded. "If I can help you to leave it with your mind at ease, I will. There is more to be said between us than we have said up to this time. My future relations with Mr. Armadale are still left undecided; and the serious question raised by my father's letter is a question which we have neither of us faced yet."

He paused and looked with a momentary impatience at the candle still burning on the table, in the morning light. The struggle to speak with composure, and to keep his own feelings stoically out of view, was evidently growing harder and harder to him.

"It may possibly help your decision," he went on, "if I tell you how I determined to act towards Mr. Armadale—in the matter of the similarity of our names—when I first read this letter, and when I had composed myself sufficiently to be able to think at all." He stopped, and cast a second impatient look at the lighted candle. "Will you excuse the odd fancy of an odd man?" he asked, with a faint smile. "I want to

put out the candle—I want to speak of the new subject, in the new light."

He extinguished the candle as he spoke, and let the first tenderness of the daylight flow uninterruptedly into the room.

"I must once more ask your patience," he resumed, "if I return for a moment to myself and my circumstances. I have already told you that my stepfather made an attempt to discover me some years after I had turned my back on the Scotch school. He took that step out of no anxiety of his own, but simply as the agent of my father's trustees. In the exercise of their discretion, they had sold the estates in Barbadoes (at the time of the emancipation of the slaves, and the ruin of West Indian property) for what the estates would fetch. Having invested the proceeds they were bound to set aside a sum for my yearly education. This responsibility obliged them to make the attempt to trace me—a fruitless attempt, as you already know. A little later (as I have been since informed) I was publicly addressed by an advertisement in the newspapers—which I never saw. Later still, when I was twenty-one, a second advertisement appeared (which I did see) offering a reward for evidence of my death. If I was alive, I had a right to my half share of the proceeds of the estates, on coming of age; if dead, the money reverted to my mother. I went to the lawyers, and heard from them what I have just told you. After some difficulty in proving my identity—and, after an interview with my stepfather, and a message from my mother, which has hopelessly widened the old breach between us—my claim was allowed; and my money is now invested for me in the funds, under the name that is really my own."

Mr. Brock drew eagerly nearer to the table. He saw the end now, to which the speaker was tending.

"Twice a year," Midwinter pursued, "I must sign my own name to get my own income. At all other times, and under all other circumstances, I may hide my identity under any name I please. As Ozias Midwinter, Mr. Armadale first knew me—as Ozias Midwinter he shall know me to the end of my days. If the story of the names is ever told, there can be no limiting it to the disclosure of my father's crime; it must go back to the story of Mrs. Armadale's marriage. I have heard her son talk of her; I know how he loves her memory. As God is my witness, he shall never love it less dearly through *me*!"

Simply as the words were spoken, they touched the deepest sympathies in the rector's nature: they took his thoughts

back to Mrs. Armadale's death-bed. He held out his hand to Midwinter for the first time. "In her name, and in her son's name," he said warmly, "I thank you."

Without replying, Midwinter spread the confession open before him on the table.

"I think I have said all that it was my duty to say," he began, "before we could approach the consideration of this letter. Whatever may have appeared strange in my conduct towards you and towards Mr. Armadale, may be now trusted to explain itself. We may come now——" his voice faltered; and he suddenly turned his face towards the window, so as to hide it from the rector's view. "We may come now," he repeated, his hand trembling visibly as it held the page, "to the murder on board the timber-ship, and to the warning that has followed me from my father's grave."

Softly—as if he feared they might reach Allan, sleeping in the neighbouring room—he read the last terrible words which the Scotchman's pen had written at Wildbad, as they fell from his father's lips.

"Avoid the widow of the man I killed—if the widow still lives. Avoid the maid whose wicked hand smoothed the way to the marriage—if the maid is still in her service. And, more than all, avoid the man who bears the same name as your own. Offend your best benefactor, if that benefactor's influence has connected you one with the other. Desert the woman who loves you, if that woman is a link between you and him. Hide yourself from him, under an assumed name. Put the mountains and the seas between you; be ungrateful; be unforgiving; be all that is most repellent to your own gentler nature, rather than live under the same roof, and breathe the same air with that man. Never let the two Allan Armadales meet in this world; never, never, never!"

"I have a question to ask you," said Mr. Brock, after a time breaking the silence between them, on his side. "Why have you just read that passage in your father's letter?"

"To force me into telling you the truth," was the answer. "You must know how much there is of my father in me, before you trust me to be Mr. Armadale's friend. I got my letter yesterday, in the morning. Some inner warning troubled me, and I went down on the sea-shore by myself, before I broke the seal. Do you believe the dead can come back to the world they once lived in? I believe my father came back in that bright morning light, through the glare of that broad sunshine and the roar of that joyful sea, and watched me while I read. When I got to the words that you

have just heard, and when I knew that the very end which he had died dreading, was the end that had really come, I felt the horror that had crept over him in his last moments, creeping over me. I struggled against myself, as *he* would have had me struggle. I tried to be all that was most repellent to my own gentler nature; I tried to think pitilessly of putting the mountains and the seas between me and the man who bore my name. Hours passed before I could prevail on myself to go back and run the risk of meeting Allan Armadale in this house. When I did get back, and when he met me at night on the stairs, I thought I was looking him in the face as *my* father looked *his* father in the face when the cabin door closed between them. Draw your own conclusions, sir. Say, if you like, that the inheritance of my father's heathen belief in Fate is one of the inheritances he has left to me. I won't dispute it; I won't deny that all through yesterday *his* superstition was *my* superstition. The night came before I could find my way to calmer and brighter thoughts. But I did find my way. You may set it down in my favour that I lifted myself at last above the influence of this horrible letter. Do you know what helped me?"

"Did you reason with yourself?"

"I can't reason about what I feel."

"Did you quiet your mind by prayer?"

"I was not fit to pray."

"And yet something guided you to the better feeling and the truer view?"

"Something did."

"What was it?"

"My love for Allan Armadale."

He cast a doubting, almost a timid, look at Mr. Brock as he gave that answer; and, suddenly leaving the table, went back to the window-seat.

"Have I no right to speak of him in that way?" he asked, keeping his face hidden from the rector. "Have I not known him long enough; have I not done enough for him yet? Remember what my experience of other men had been, when I first saw his hand held out to me; when I first heard his voice speaking to me in my sick room. What had I known of strangers' hands all through my childhood? I had only known them as hands raised to threaten and to strike me. *His* hand put my pillow straight, and patted me on the shoulder, and gave me my food and drink. What had I known of other men's voices, when I was growing up to be a man myself? I had only known them as voices that jeered,

voices that cursed, voices that whispered in corners with a vile distrust. *His* voice said to me, 'Cheer up, Midwinter! we'll soon bring you round again. You'll be strong enough in a week to go out for a drive with me in our Somersetshire lanes.' It *will* come out of me—I can't keep it back. I love the very ground he treads on! I would give my life—yes, the life that is precious to me now, because his kindness has made it a happy one—I tell you I would give my life——"

The next words died away on his lips; the hysterical passion rose, and conquered him. He stretched out one of his hands with a wild gesture of entreaty to Mr. Brock; his head sank on the window-sill, and he burst into tears.

Even then, the hard discipline of the man's life asserted itself. He expected no sympathy; he counted on no merciful human respect for human weakness. The cruel necessity of self-suppression was present to his mind, while the tears were pouring over his cheeks. "Give me a minute," he said, faintly. "I'll fight it down in a minute; I won't distress you in this way again."

True to his resolution, in a minute he had fought it down. In a minute more he was able to speak calmly.

"We will get back, sir, to those better thoughts which have brought me from my room to yours," he resumed. "I can only repeat that I should never have torn myself from the hold which this letter fastened on me, if I had not loved Allan Armadale with all that I have in me of a brother's love. I said to myself, 'If the thought of leaving him breaks my heart, the thought of leaving him is wrong!' That was some hours since—and I am in the same mind still. I can't believe—I won't believe—that a friendship which has grown out of nothing but kindness on one side, and nothing but gratitude on the other, is destined to lead to an evil end. Judge, you who are a clergyman, between the dead father, whose word is in these pages, and the living son, whose word is now on his lips! What is it appointed me to do—now that I am breathing the same air, and living under the same roof with the son of the man whom my father killed—to perpetuate my father's crime by mortally injuring him? or to atone for my father's crime by giving him the devotion of my whole life? The last of those two faiths is my faith—and shall be my faith, happen what may. In the strength of that better conviction, I have come here to trust you with my father's secret, and to confess the wretched story of my own life. In the strength of that better conviction, I can face you resolutely with the one plain question, which marks the one plain end

of all that I have come here to say. Your pupil stands at the starting-point of his new career, in a position singularly friendless; his one great need is a companion of his own age on whom he can rely. The time has come, sir, to decide whether I am to be that companion or not After all you have heard of Ozias Midwinter, tell me plainly, will you trust him to be Allan Armadale's friend?"

Mr. Brock met that fearlessly frank question by a fearless frankness on his side.

"I believe you love Allan," he said; "and I believe you have spoken the truth. A man who has produced that impression on me, is a man whom I am bound to trust. I trust you."

Midwinter started to his feet—his dark face flushing deep; his eyes fixed brightly and steadily, at last, on the rector's face. "A light!" he exclaimed, tearing the pages of his father's letter, one by one, from the fastening that held them. "Let us destroy the last link that holds us to the horrible past! Let us see this confession a heap of ashes before we part!"

"Wait!" said Mr. Brock. "Before you burn it, there is a reason for looking at it once more."

The parted leaves of the manuscript dropped from Midwinter's hands. Mr. Brock took them up, and sorted them carefully until he found the last page.

"I view your father's superstition as you view it," said the rector. "But there is a warning given you here, which you will do well (for Allan's sake, and for your own sake) not to neglect. The last link with the past will not be destroyed when you have burnt these pages. One of the actors in this story of treachery and murder is not dead yet. Read those words."

He pushed the page across the table, with his finger on one sentence. Midwinter's agitation misled him. He mistook the indication, and read, "Avoid the widow of the man I killed—if the widow still lives."

"Not that sentence," said the rector. "The next."

Midwinter read it: "Avoid the maid whose wicked hand smoothed the way to the marriage—if the maid is still in her service."

"The maid and the mistress parted," said Mr. Brock, "at the time of the mistress's marriage. The maid and the mistress met again at Mrs. Armadale's residence in Somersetshire, last year. I myself met the woman in the village, and I my-

self know that her visit hastened Mrs. Armadale's death. Wait a little, and compose yourself; I see I have startled you."

"Can you put me on my guard against her?" Midwinter asked, after a long interval of silence. "Can you tell me her name?"

"I can only tell you what Mrs. Armadale told me," answered Mr. Brock. "The woman acknowledged having been married in the long interval since she and her mistress had last met. But not a word more escaped her about her past life. She came to Mrs. Armadale to ask for money, under a plea of distress. She got the money, and she left the house, positively refusing, when the question was put to her, to mention her married name."

"You saw her yourself in the village. What was she like?"

"She kept her veil down. I can't tell you."

"You can tell me what you *did* see?"

"Certainly. I saw, as she approached me, that she moved very gracefully, that she had a beautiful figure, and that she was a little over the middle height. I noticed, when she asked me the way to Mrs. Armadale's house, that her manner was the manner of a lady, and that the tone of her voice was remarkably soft and winning. Lastly, I remembered afterwards, that she wore a thick black veil, a black bonnet, a black silk dress, and a red Paisley shawl. I feel all the importance of your possessing some better means of identifying her than I can give you. But unhappily——"

He stopped. Midwinter was leaning eagerly across the table, and Midwinter's hand was laid suddenly on his arm.

"Is it possible that you know the woman?" asked Mr. Brock, surprised at the sudden change in his manner.

"No."

"What have I said, then, that has startled you so?"

"Do you remember the woman who threw herself from the river steamer?" asked the other—"the woman who caused that succession of deaths, which opened Allan Armadale's way to the Thorpe-Ambrose estate?"

"I remember the description of her in the police report," answered the rector.

"That woman," pursued Midwinter, "moved gracefully, and had a beautiful figure. *That* woman wore a black veil, a black bonnet, a black silk gown, and a red Paisley shawl!——"

If the conjecture was right, the one event in the past which had appeared to be entirely disconnected with the events that had preceded it, was, on the contrary, the one missing link

which made the chain complete. Mr. Brock's comfortable commonsense instinctively denied that startling conclusion. He looked at Midwinter with a compassionate smile.

"My young friend," he said kindly, "have you cleared your mind of all superstition as completely as you think? Is what you have just said worthy of the better resolution at which you arrived last night?"

"You are beginning to doubt my sincerity," Midwinter said. "I can't blame you."

"I believe in your sincerity as firmly as ever," answered Mr. Brock. "I only doubt whether you have fortified the weak places in your nature as strongly as you yourself suppose. Many a man has lost the battle against himself far oftener than you have lost it yet, and has nevertheless won his victory in the end. Come! come! Let your own better sense help you; and you will agree with me, that there is really no evidence to justify the suspicion that the woman whom I met in Somersetshire, and the woman who attempted suicide in London, are one and the same. Need an old man, like me, remind a young man, like you, that there are thousands of women in England, with beautiful figures—thousands of women who are quietly dressed in black silk gowns and red Paisley shawls?"

Midwinter caught eagerly at the suggestion; too eagerly, as it might have occurred to a harder critic on humanity than Mr. Brock.

"You are quite right, sir," he said, "and I am quite wrong. Tens of thousands of women answer the description, as you say. I have been wasting time on my own idle fancies, when I ought to have been carefully gathering up facts. If this woman ever attempts to find her way to Allan, I must be prepared to stop her." He began searching restlessly among the manuscript leaves scattered about the table, paused over one of the pages, and examined it attentively. "This helps me to something positive," he went on; "this helps me to a knowledge of her age. She was twelve at the time of Mrs. Armadale's marriage; add a year, and bring her to thirteen; add Allan's age (twenty-two), and we make her a woman of five-and-thirty at the present time. I know her age; and I know that she has her own reasons for being silent about her married life. This is something gained at the outset, and it may lead, in time, to something more." He looked up brightly again at Mr. Brock. "Am I in the right way now, sir? Am I doing my best to profit by the caution which you have kindly given me?"

"You are vindicating your own better sense," answered the rector. "You are paving the way for your own happier life."

"Am I?" said the other, thoughtfully.

He searched among the papers once more, and stopped at another of the scattered pages.

"The ship!" he exclaimed suddenly, his colour changing again, and his manner altering on the instant.

"What ship?" asked the rector.

"The ship in which the deed was done," Midwinter answered, with the first signs of impatience that he had shown yet. "The ship in which my father's murderous hand turned the lock of the cabin door."

"What of it?" said Mr. Brock.

He appeared not to hear the question; his eyes remained fixed intently on the page that he was reading.

"A French vessel, employed in the timber-trade," he said, still speaking to himself, "a French vessel, named *La Grâce de Dieu*. If my father's belief had been the right belief—if the Fatality had been following me, step by step, from my father's grave—in one or other of my voyages, I should have fallen in with that ship." He looked up again at Mr. Brock. "I am quite sure about it now," he said. "Those women are two—and not one."

Mr. Brock shook his head.

"I am glad you have come to that conclusion," he said. "But I wish you had reached it in some other way."

Midwinter started passionately to his feet, and seizing on the pages of the manuscript with both hands, flung them into the empty fire-place.

"For God's sake, let me burn it!" he exclaimed. "As long as there is a page left, I shall read it. And, as long as I read it, my father gets the better of me, in spite of myself!"

Mr. Brock pointed to the match-box. In another moment, the confession was in flames. When the fire had consumed the last morsel of paper, Midwinter drew a deep breath of relief.

"I may say, like Macbeth: 'Why, so, being gone, I am a man again!'" he broke out with a feverish gaiety. "You look fatigued, sir; and no wonder," he added in a lower tone. "I have kept you too long from your rest—I will keep you no longer. Depend on my remembering what you have told me; depend on my standing between Allan and any enemy, man or woman, who comes near him. Thank you, Mr. Brock; a thousand thousand times, thank you! I came

into this room the most wretched of living men; I can leave it now as happy as the birds that are singing outside!"

As he turned to the door, the rays of the rising sun streamed through the window, and touched the heap of ashes lying black in the black fire-place. The sensitive imagination of Midwinter kindled instantly at the sight.

"Look!" he said, joyously. "The promise of the Future shining over the ashes of the Past!"

An inexplicable pity for the man, at the moment of his life when he needed pity least, stole over the rector's heart, when the door had closed, and he was left by himself again.

"Poor fellow!" he said, with an uneasy surprise at his own compassionate impulse. "Poor fellow!"

CHAPTER III

DAY AND NIGHT

The morning hours had passed; the noon had come and gone; and Mr. Brock had started on the first stage of his journey home.

After parting from the rector in Douglas Harbour, the two young men had returned to Castletown, and had there separated at the hotel door—Allan walking down to the water-side to look after his yacht, and Midwinter entering the house, to get the rest that he needed after a sleepless night.

He darkened his room; he closed his eyes—but no sleep came to him. On this first day of the rector's absence, his sensitive nature extravagantly exaggerated the responsibility which he now held in trust for Mr. Brock. A nervous dread of leaving Allan by himself, even for a few hours only, kept him waking and doubting until it became a relief, rather than a hardship, to rise from the bed again, and following in Allan's footsteps, to take the way to the waterside which led to the yacht.

The repairs of the little vessel were nearly completed. It was a breezy, cheerful day; the land was bright, the water was blue, the quick waves leapt crisply in the sunshine, the men were singing at their work. Descending to the cabin, Mid-winter discovered his friend busily occupied in attempting to set the place to rights. Habitually the least systematic of mortals, Allan now and then awoke to an overwhelming sense of the advantages of order—and on such occasions a perfect

frenzy of tidiness possessed him. He was down on his knees, hotly and wildly at work, when Midwinter looked in on him; and was fast reducing the neat little world of the cabin to its original elements of chaos, with a misdirected energy wonderful to see.

"Here's a mess!" said Allan, rising composedly on the horizon of his own accumulated litter. "Do you know, my dear fellow, I begin to wish I had let well alone."

Midwinter smiled, and came to his friend's assistance with the natural neat-handedness of a sailor.

The first object that he encountered was Allan's dressing-case, turned upside down, with half the contents scattered on the floor, and with a duster and a hearth-broom lying among them. Replacing the various objects which formed the furniture of the dressing-case, one by one, Midwinter lighted unexpectedly on a miniature portrait, of the old-fashioned oval form, primly framed in a setting of small diamonds.

"You don't seem to set much value on this," he said. "What is it?"

Allan bent over him, and looked at the miniature.

"It belonged to my mother," he answered; "and I set the greatest value on it. It is a portrait of my father."

Midwinter put the miniature abruptly into Allan's hands, and withdrew to the opposite side of the cabin where he began setting in order the litter scattered about him on the cabin table and on the floor. But it seemed as if fate had decided that his friend's personal possessions should fall into his hands that morning, employ them where he might. One among the first objects which he took up was Allan's tobacco-jar, with the stopper missing, and with a letter (which appeared by the bulk of it to contain enclosures) crumpled into the mouth of the jar in the stopper's place.

"Did you know that you had put this there?" he asked. "Is the letter of any importance?"

Allan recognised it instantly. It was the first of the little series of letters which had followed the cruising party to the Isle of Man—the letter which young Armadale had briefly referred to as bringing him "more worries from those everlasting lawyers," and had then dismissed from further notice as recklessly as usual.

"This is what comes of being particularly careful," said Allan; "here is an instance of my extreme thoughtfulness. You may not think it, but I put the letter there on purpose. Every time I went to the jar, you know, I was sure to see the

letter; and every time I saw the letter, I was sure to say to myself: 'This must be answered.' There's nothing to laugh at; it was a perfectly sensible arrangement—if I could only have remembered where I put the jar. Suppose I tie a knot in my pocket handkerchief this time? You have a wonderful memory, my dear fellow. Perhaps you'll remind me in the course of the day, in case I forget the knot next."

Midwinter saw his first chance, since Mr. Brock's departure, of usefully filling Mr. Brock's place.

"Here is your writing-case," he said; "why not answer the letter at once? If you put it away again, you may forget it again."

"Very true," returned Allan. "But the worst of it is, I can't quite make up my mind what answer to write. I want a word of advice. Come and sit down here, and I'll tell you all about it."

With his loud boyish laugh—echoed by Midwinter, who caught the infection of his gaiety—he swept a heap of miscellaneous encumbrances off the cabin sofa, and made room for his friend and himself to take their places. In the high flow of youthful spirits, the two sat down to their trifling consultation over a letter lost in a tobacco-jar. It was a memorable moment to both of them, lightly as they thought of it at the time. Before they had risen again from their places, they had taken the first irrevocable step together on the dark and tortuous road of their future lives.

Reduced to plain facts, the question on which Allan now required his friend's advice, may be stated as follows:—

While the various arrangements connected with the succession to Thorpe-Ambrose were in process of settlement, and while the new possessor of the estate was still in London, a question had necessarily arisen relating to the person who should be appointed to manage the property. The steward employed by the Blanchard family had written, without loss of time, to offer his services. Although a perfectly competent and trustworthy man, he failed to find favour in the eyes of the new proprietor. Acting, as usual, on his first impulses, and resolved, at all hazards, to install Midwinter as a permanent inmate at Thorpe-Ambrose, Allan had determined that the steward's place was the place exactly fitted for his friend —for the simple reason that it would necessarily oblige his friend to live with him on the estate. He had accordingly written to decline the proposal made to him, without consulting Mr. Brock, whose disapproval he had good reason to fear;

and without telling Midwinter, who would probably (if a chance were allowed to him of choosing) have declined taking a situation which his previous training had by no means fitted him to fill.

Further correspondence had followed this decision, and had raised two new difficulties which looked a little embarrassing on the face of them, but which Allan, with the assistance of his lawyers, easily contrived to solve. The first difficulty, of examining the outgoing steward's books, was settled by sending a professional accountant to Thorpe-Ambrose; and the second difficulty, of putting the steward's empty cottage to some profitable use (Allan's plans for his friend comprehending Midwinter's residence under his own roof), was met by placing the cottage on the list of an active house-agent in the neighbouring county town. In this state the arrangements had been left when Allan quitted London. He had heard and thought nothing more of the matter, until a letter from his lawyers had followed him to the Isle of Man—enclosing two proposals to occupy the cottage—both received on the same day—and requesting to hear, at his earliest convenience, which of the two he was prepared to accept.

Finding himself, after having conveniently forgotten the subject for some days past, placed face to face once more with the necessity for decision, Allan now put the two proposals into his friend's hands, and, after a rambling explanation of the circumstances of the case, requested to be favoured with a word of advice. Instead of examining the proposals, Midwinter unceremoniously put them aside, and asked the two very natural and very awkward questions of who the new steward was to be, and why he was to live in Allan's house?

"I'll tell you who, and I'll tell you why, when we get to Thorpe-Ambrose," said Allan. "In the meantime we'll call the steward X. Y. Z., and we'll say he lives with me, because I'm devilish sharp, and I mean to keep him under my own eye. You needn't look surprised."

The humorous twinkle in Allan's eye, the sly significance in Allan's voice, would have betrayed his secret to a prosperous man. Midwinter was as far from suspecting it as the carpenters who were at work above them on the deck of the yacht.

"Is there no steward now on the estate?" he asked, his face showing plainly that he was far from feeling satisfied with Allan's answer. "Is the business neglected all this time?"

"Nothing of the sort!" returned Allan. "The business is

going with 'a wet sheet and a flowing sail, and a wind that follows free.' I'm not joking—I'm only metaphorical. A regular accountant has poked his nose into the books, and a steady-going lawyer's clerk attends at the office once a week. That doésn't look like neglect, does it? Leave the new steward alone for the present, and just tell me which of those two tenants you would take, if you were in my place."

Midwinter opened the proposals, and read them attentively.

The first proposal was from no less a person than the solicitor at Thorpe-Ambrose, who had first informed Allan at Paris of the large fortune that had fallen into his hands. This gentleman wrote personally, to say that he had long admired the cottage, which was charmingly situated within the limits of the Thorpe-Ambrose grounds. He was a bachelor, of studious habits, desirous of retiring to a country seclusion after the wear and tear of his business hours; and he ventured to say that Mr. Armadale, in accepting him as a tenant, might count on securing an unobtrusive neighbour, and on putting the cottage into responsible and careful hands.

The second proposal came through the house-agent, and proceeded from a total stranger. The tenant who offered for the cottage, in this case, was a retired officer in the army—one Major Milroy. His family merely consisted of an invalid wife and an only child—a young lady. His references were unexceptionable; and he, too, was especially anxious to secure the cottage, as the perfect quiet of the situation was exactly what was required by Mrs. Milroy in her feeble state of health.

"Well! which profession shall I favour?" asked Allan. "The army or the law?"

"There seems to me to be no doubt about it," said Midwinter. "The lawyer has been already in correspondence with you; and the lawyer's claim is, therefore, the claim to be preferred."

"I knew you would say that. In all the thousands of times I have asked other people for advice, I never yet got the advice I wanted. Here's this business of letting the cottage as an instance. I'm all on the other side myself. I want to have the major."

"Why?"

Young Armadale laid his forefinger on that part of the agent's letter which enumerated Major Milroy's family, and which contained the three words—"a young lady."

"A bachelor of studious habits walking about my grounds," said Allan, "is not an interesting object; a young lady is. I

cook's shop. "Let's try if we can't find something else to amuse us in the next street."

The first amusing object which the next street presented was a carver-and-gilder's shop, expiring feebly in the last stage of commercial decay. The counter inside displayed nothing to view but the recumbent head of a boy, peacefully asleep in the unbroken solitude of the place. In the window were exhibited to the passing stranger three forlorn little fly-spotted frames; a small posting-bill, dusty with long-continued neglect, announcing that the premises were to let; and one coloured print, the last of a series illustrating the horrors of drunkenness, on the fiercest temperance principles. The composition—representing an empty bottle of gin, an immensely spacious garret, a perpendicular Scripture-reader, and a horizontal expiring family—appealed to public favour, under the entirely unobjectionable title of The Hand of Death. Allan's resolution to extract amusement from Castletown by main force had resisted a great deal, but it failed him at this stage of the investigations. He suggested trying an excursion to some other place. Midwinter readily agreeing, they went back to the hotel to make inquiries.

There they were told that the finest coast scenery in the island was said to be to the westward and the southward, and there was a fishing town in those regions called Port St. Mary, with an hotel at which travellers could sleep. If Allan's impressions of Castletown still inclined him to try an excursion to some other place, he had only to say so, and a carriage would be produced immediately. Allan jumped at the proposal, and in ten minutes more, he and Midwinter were on their way to the western wilds of the island.

With trifling incidents, the day of Mr. Brock's departure had worn on thus far. With trifling incidents, in which not even Midwinter's nervous watchfulness could see anything to distrust, it was still to proceed, until the night came—a night which one at least of the two companions was destined to remember to the end of his life.

Before the travellers had advanced two miles on their road, an accident happened. The horse fell, and the driver reported that the animal had seriously injured himself. There was no alternative but to send for another carriage to Castletown, or to get on to Port St. Mary on foot.

Deciding to walk, Midwinter and Allan had not gone far before they were overtaken by a gentleman driving alone in an open chaise. He civilly introduced himself as a medical

man, living close to Port St. Mary, and offered seats in his carriage. Always ready to make new acquaintances, Allan at once accepted the proposal. He and the doctor (whose name was ascertained to be Hawbury) became friendly and familiar before they had been five minutes in the chaise together; Mid-winter sitting behind them, reserved and silent, on the back seat. They separated just outside Port St. Mary, before Mr. Hawbury's house, Allan boisterously admiring the doctor's neat French windows, and pretty flower-garden and lawn; and wringing his hand at parting, as if they had known each other from boyhood upwards. Arrived in Port St. Mary, the two friends found themselves in a second Castletown on a smaller scale. But the country round, wild, open, and hilly, deserved its reputation. A walk brought them well enough on with the day—still the harmless, idle day that it had been from the first—to see the evening near at hand. After waiting a little to admire the sun, setting grandly over hill, and heath, and crag, and talking, while they waited, of Mr. Brock and his long journey home—they returned to the hotel to order their early supper. Nearer and nearer, the night, and the adventure which the night was to bring with it, came to the two friends; and still the only incidents that happened were incidents to be laughed at, if they were noticed at all. The supper was badly cooked; the waiting-maid was impenetrably stupid; the old-fashioned bell-rope in the coffee-room had come down in Allan's hands, and striking in its descent a painted china shepherdess on the chimney-piece, had laid the figure in fragments on the floor. Events as trifling as these were still the only events that had happened, when the twilight faded, and the lighted candles were brought into the room.

The "bar" of the hotel was situated at one end of the passage; and the landlady was in attendance there, mixing a glass of liquor for the doctor, who had just looked in for a little gossip. On Allan's asking permission to make a third in the drinking and the gossiping, Mr. Hawbury civilly handed him the glass which the landlady had just filled. It contained cold brandy-and-water. A marked change in Allan's face, as he suddenly drew back and asked for whisky instead, caught the doctor's medical eye. "A case of nervous antipathy," said Mr. Hawbury, quietly taking the glass away again. The remark obliged Allan to acknowledge that he had an insurmountable loathing (which he was foolish enough to be a little ashamed of mentioning) to the smell and taste of brandy. No matter with what diluting liquid the spirit was mixed, the presence of it—instantly detected by his organs of taste and

smell—turned him sick and faint, if the drink touched his lips. Starting from this personal confession, the talk turned on antipathies in general; and the doctor acknowledged, on his side, that he took a professional interest in the subject, and that he possessed a collection of curious cases at home, which his new acquaintance was welcome to look at, if Allan had nothing else to do that evening, and if he would call when the medical work of the day was over, and that would be in an hour's time.

Cordially accepting the invitation (which was extended to Midwinter also, if he cared to profit by it), Allan returned to the coffee-room to look after his friend. Half asleep and half awake, Midwinter was still stretched on the sofa with the local newspaper just dropping out of his languid hand.

"I heard your voice in the passage," he said drowsily "Who were you talking to?"

"The doctor," replied Allan. "I am going to smoke a cigar with him, in an hour's time. Will you come too?"

Midwinter assented with a weary sigh. Always shyly unwilling to make new acquaintances, fatigue increased the reluctance he now felt to become Mr. Hawbury's guest. As matters stood, however, there was no alternative but to go—for, with Allan's constitutional imprudence, there was no safely trusting him alone anywhere, and more especially in a stranger's house. Mr. Brock would certainly not have left his pupil to visit the doctor alone; and Midwinter was still nervously conscious that he occupied Mr. Brock's place.

"What shall we do till it's time to go?" asked Allan, looking about him. "Anything in this?" he added, observing the fallen newspaper, and picking it up from the floor.

"I'm too tired to look. If you find anything interesting, read it out," said Midwinter—thinking that the reading might help to keep him awake.

Part of the newspaper, and no small part of it, was devoted to extracts from books recently published in London. One was a highly spiced narrative of Travelling Adventures in the wilds of Australia. Pouncing on an extract which described the sufferings of the travelling-party, lost in a trackless wilderness, and in danger of dying by thirst, Allan announced that he had found something to make his friend's flesh creep, and began eagerly to read the passage aloud.

Resolute not to sleep, Midwinter at first followed the progress of the adventure, sentence by sentence, without missing a word. Soon, the words seemed to drop away gently, and nothing but the slowly-sinking sound of the voice was left.

Then, the light in the room darkened gradually; the sound dwindled into delicious silence; and the last waking impressions of the weary Midwinter came peacefully to an end.

The next event of which he was conscious, was a sharp ringing at the closed door of the hotel. He started to his feet, with the ready alacrity of a man whose life has accustomed him to wake at the shortest notice. An instant's look round showed him that the room was empty; and a glance at his watch told him that it was close on midnight. The noise made by the sleepy servant in opening the door, and the tread the next moment of quick footsteps in the passage, filled him with a sudden foreboding of something wrong. As he hurriedly stepped forward to go out and make inquiry, the door of the coffee-room opened, and the doctor stood before him.

"I am sorry to disturb you," said Mr. Hawbury. "Don't be alarmed; there's nothing wrong."

"Where is my friend?" asked Midwinter.

"At the pier-head," answered the doctor. "I am, to a certain extent, responsible for what he is doing now; and I think some careful person, like yourself, ought to be with him."

The hint was enough for Midwinter. He and the doctor set out for the pier immediately—Mr. Hawbury mentioning, on the way, the circumstances under which he had come to the hotel.

Punctual to the appointed hour, Allan had made his appearance at the doctor's house; explaining that he had left his weary friend so fast asleep on the sofa that he had not had the heart to wake him. The evening had passed pleasantly, and the conversation had turned on many subjects—until, in an evil hour, Mr. Hawbury had dropped a hint which showed that he was fond of sailing, and that he possessed a pleasure-boat of his own in the harbour. Excited on the instant by his favourite topic, Allan had left his host no hospitable alternative but to take him to the pier-head and show him the boat. The beauty of the night and the softness of the breeze had done the rest of the mischief—they had filled Allan with irresistible longings for a sail by moonlight. Prevented from accompanying his guest by professional hindrances which obliged him to remain on shore, the doctor, not knowing what else to do, had ventured on disturbing Midwinter, rather than take the responsibility of allowing Mr. Armadale (no matter how well he might be accustomed to the sea) to set off on a sailing trip at midnight entirely by himself.

The time taken to make this explanation brought Midwinter

and the doctor to the pier-head. There, sure enough, was young Armadale in the boat, hoisting the sail, and singing the sailor's "Yo-heave-ho!" at the top of his voice.

"Come along, old boy!" cried Allan. "You're just in time for a frolic by moonlight!"

Midwinter suggested a frolic by daylight, and an adjournment to bed in the meantime.

"Bed!" cried Allan, on whose harum-scarum high spirits Mr. Hawbury's hospitality had certainly not produced a sedative effect. "Hear him, doctor! one would think he was ninety! Bed, you drowsy old dormouse! Look at that—and think of bed, if you can!"

He pointed to the sea. The moon was shining in the cloudless heaven; the night-breeze blew soft and steady from the land; the peaceful waters rippled joyfully in the silence and the glory of the night. Midwinter turned to the doctor, with a wise resignation to circumstances: he had seen enough to satisfy him that all words of remonstrance would be words simply thrown away.

"How is the tide?" he asked.

Mr. Hawbury told him.

"Are the oars in the boat?"

"Yes."

"I am well used to the sea," said Midwinter, descending the pier-steps. "You may trust me to take care of my friend, and to take care of the boat."

"Good-night, doctor!" shouted Allan. "Your whiskey-and-water is delicious—your boat's a little beauty—and you're the best fellow I ever met in my life!"

The doctor laughed, and waved his hand; and the boat glided out from the harbour, with Midwinter at the helm.

As the breeze then blew, they were soon abreast of the westward headland, bounding the bay of Poolvash; and the question was started whether they should run out to sea, or keep along the shore. The wisest proceeding, in the event of the wind failing them, was to keep by the land. Midwinter altered the course of the boat, and they sailed on smoothly in a south-westerly direction, abreast of the coast.

Little by little the cliffs rose in height, and the rocks, massed wild and jagged, showed rifted black chasms yawning deep in their seaward sides. Off the bold promontory called Spanish Head, Midwinter looked ominously at his watch. But Allan pleaded hard for half-an-hour more, and for a glance at the famous channel of the Sound, which they were now fast nearing, and of which he had heard some startling stories from

the workmen employed on his yacht. The new change which Midwinter's compliance with this request rendered it necessary to make in the course of the boat, brought her close to the wind; and revealed, on one side, the grand view of the southernmost shores of the Isle of Man, and, on the other, the black precipices of the islet called the Calf, separated from the mainland by the dark and dangerous channel of the Sound.

Once more Midwinter looked at his watch. "We have gone far enough," he said. "Stand by the sheet!"

"Stop!" cried Allan, from the bows of the boat. "Good God! here's a wrecked ship right ahead of us!"

Midwinter let the boat fall off a little, and looked where the other pointed.

High, and dark, and ghostly in the yellow moonshine, lay the Wrecked Ship.

"I know the vessel," said Allan, in great excitement. "I heard my workmen talking of her yesterday. She drifted in here, on a pitch dark night, when they couldn't see the lights. A poor old worn-out merchantman, Midwinter, that the ship-brokers have bought to break up. Let's run in, and have a look at her."

Midwinter hesitated. All the old sympathies of his sea-life strongly inclined him to follow Allan's suggestion—but the wind was falling light; and he distrusted the broken water and the swirling currents of the channel ahead. "This is an ugly place to take a boat into, when you know nothing about it," he said.

"Nonsense!" returned Allan. "It's as light as day, and we float in two feet of water."

Before Midwinter could answer, the current caught the boat, and swept them onward through the channel, straight towards the Wreck.

"Lower the sail," said Midwinter quietly, "and ship the oars. We are running down on her fast enough now, whether we like it or not."

Both well accustomed to the use of the oar, they brought the course of the boat under sufficient control to keep her on the smoothest side of the channel— the side which was nearest to the Islet of the Calf. As they came swiftly up with the wreck, Midwinter resigned his oar to Allan; and, watching his opportunity, caught a hold with the boat-hook on the fore-chains of the vessel. The next moment they had the boat safely in and under the lee of the Wreck.

The ship's ladder used by the workmen hung over the fore-chains. Mounting it, with the boat's rope in his teeth, Mid-

winter secured one end, and lowered the other to Allan in the boat. "Make that fast," he said, "and wait till I see if it's all safe on board." With those words, he disappeared behind the bulwark.

"Wait?" repeated Allan, in the blankest astonishment at his friend's excessive caution. "What on earth does he mean? I'll be hanged if I wait—where one of us goes, the other goes too!"

He hitched the loose end of the rope round the forward thwart of the boat; and, swinging himself up the ladder, stood the next moment on the deck. "Anything very dreadful on board?" he inquired sarcastically, as he and his friend met.

Midwinter smiled. "Nothing whatever," he replied. "But I couldn't be sure that we were to have the whole ship to ourselves, till I got over the bulwark, and looked about me."

Allan took a turn on the deck, and surveyed the wreck critically from stem to stern.

"Not much of a vessel," he said; "the Frenchmen generally build better ships than this."

Midwinter crossed the deck, and eyed Allan in a momentary silence.

"Frenchmen?" he repeated, after an interval. "Is this vessel French?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"The men I have got at work on the yacht told me. They know all about her."

Midwinter came a little nearer. His swarthy face began to look, to Allan's eyes, unaccountably pale in the moonlight.

"Did they mention what trade she was engaged in?"

"Yes—the timber-trade."

As Allan gave that answer, Midwinter's lean brown hand clutched him fast by the shoulder; and Midwinter's teeth chattered in his head, like the teeth of a man struck by a sudden chill.

"Did they tell you her name?" he asked, in a voice that dropped suddenly to a whisper.

"They did, I think. But it has slipped my memory—gently, old fellow; those long claws of yours are rather tight on my shoulder."

"Was the name——?" he stopped; removed his hand; and dashed away the great drops that were gathering on his forehead—"was the name *La Grâce de Dieu*?"

"How the deuce did you come to know it? That's the name, sure enough. *La Grâce de Dieu.*"

At one bound, Midwinter leapt on the bulwark of the wreck.

"The boat!!!" he cried, with a scream of horror that rang far and wide through the stillness of the night, and brought Allan instantly to his side.

The lower end of the carelessly-hitched rope was loose on the water; and, ahead, in the track of the moonlight, a small black object was floating out of view. The boat was adrift.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHADOW OF THE PAST

On gaining the after-part of the vessel, Allan walked straight to the stern, and looked out to sea over the taffrail. No such thing as a boat was in view anywhere on the quiet moon-brightened waters. Knowing Midwinter's sight to be better than his own, he called out: "Come up here, and see if there's a fisherman within hail of us." Hearing no reply, he looked back. Midwinter had followed him as far as the cabin, and had stopped there. He called again, in a louder voice, and beckoned impatiently. Midwinter had heard the call, for he looked up—but still he never stirred from his place. There he stood, as if he had reached the utmost limits of the ship, and could go no further.

Allan went back and joined him. It was not easy to discover what he was looking at, for he kept his face turned away from the moonlight; but it seemed as if his eyes were fixed, with a strange expression of inquiry on the cabin door. "What is there to look at there?" Allan asked. "Let's see if it's locked." As he took a step forward to open the door, Midwinter's hand seized him suddenly by the coat-collar and forced him back. The moment after, the hand relaxed without losing its grasp, and trembled violently, like the hand of a man completely unnerved.

"Am I to consider myself in custody?" asked Allan, half astonished and half amused. "Why, in the name of wonder, do you keep staring at the cabin door? Mercy preserve us! (as the old women say) do you see a ghost?"

"*I see two!*" answered the other, driven headlong into speech and action by a maddening temptation to reveal the truth. "Two!" he repeated, his breath bursting from him in deep, heavy gasps, as he tried vainly to force back the horrible words. "The ghost of a man like you drowning in the cabin!

And the ghost of a man like me, turning the lock of the door on him!"

Once more, young Armadale's hearty laughter rang out loud and long through the stillness of the night.

"Turning the lock of the door, is he?" said Allan, as soon as his merriment left him breath enough to speak. "That's a devilish unhandsome action, Master Midwinter, on the part of your ghost. The least I can do, after that, is to let mine out of the cabin, and give him the run of the ship."

With no more than a momentary exertion of his superior strength, he freed himself easily from Midwinter's hold. "Below there!" he called out gaily, as he laid his strong hand on the crazy lock, and tore open the cabin door. "Ghost of Allan Armadale, come on deck!" In his terrible ignorance of the truth, he put his head into the doorway, and looked down, laughing, at the place where his murdered father had died. "Pah!" he exclaimed, stepping back suddenly, with a shudder of disgust. "The air is foul already—and the cabin is full of water."

It was true. The sunken rocks on which the vessel lay wrecked had burst their way through her lower timbers astern, and the waters had welled up through the rifted wood. Here, where the deed had been done, the fatal parallel between past and present was complete. What the cabin had been in the time of the fathers, that the cabin was now in the time of the sons.

Allan pushed the door to again with his foot, a little surprised at the sudden silence which appeared to have fallen on his friend, from the moment when he had laid his hand on the cabin lock. When he turned to look, the reason of the silence was instantly revealed. Midwinter had dropped on the deck. He lay senseless before the cabin door; his face turned up, white and still, to the moonlight, like the face of a dead man.

In a moment, Allan was at his side. He looked uselessly round the lonely limits of the wreck, as he lifted Midwinter's head on his knee, for a chance of help, where all chance was ruthlessly cut off. "What am I to do?" he said to himself, in the first impulse of alarm. "Not a drop of water near, but the foul water in the cabin." A sudden recollection crossed his memory; the florid colour rushed back over his face; and he drew from his pocket a wicker-covered flask. "God bless the doctor for giving me this before we sailed!" he broke out fervently, as he poured down Midwinter's throat some drops of the raw whisky which the flask contained. The stimulant

acted instantly on the sensitive system of the swooning man. He sighed faintly, and slowly opened his eyes. "Have I been dreaming?" he asked, looking up vacantly in Allan's face. His eyes wandered higher, and encountered the dismantled masts of the wreck rising weird and black against the night sky. He shuddered at the sight of them, and hid his face on Allan's knee. "No dream!" he murmured to himself, mournfully, "Oh me, no dream!"

"You have been over-tired all day," said Allan; "and this infernal adventure of ours has upset you. Take some more whisky—it's sure to do you good. Can you sit by yourself, if I put you against the bulwark, so?"

"Why by myself? Why do you leave me?" asked Midwinter.

Allan pointed to the mizen shrouds of the wreck, which were still left standing. "You are not well enough to rough it here till the workmen come off in the morning," he said. "We must find our way on shore at once, if we can. I am going up to get a good view all round, and see if there's a house within hail of us."

Even in the moment that passed while those few words were spoken, Midwinter's eyes wandered back distrustfully to the fatal cabin door. "Don't go near it!" he whispered. "Don't try to open it, for God's sake?"

Allan turned away quickly, convinced that his mind had not yet recovered the shock of the fainting fit. "Don't forget the whisky!" he said cheerfully, as he sprang into the rigging, and mounted to the mizen-top.

It was past two; the moon was waning; and the darkness that comes before dawn was beginning to gather round the wreck. Behind Allan, as he now stood looking out from the elevation of the mizen-top, spread the broad and lonely sea. Before him, were the low, black, lurking rocks, and the broken waters of the channel, pouring white and angry into the vast calm of the westward ocean beyond. On the right hand, heaved back grandly from the waterside, were the rocks and precipices, with their little tablelands of grass between; the sloping downs, and upward-rolling heath solitudes of the Isle of Man. On the left hand, rose the craggy sides of the Islet of the Calf—here, rent wildly into deep black chasms; there, lying low under long sweeping acclivities of grass and heath.

Even Allan's careless nature felt the solemn influence of the time. The sound of his own voice startled him, when he looked down and hailed his friend on deck.

"I think I see one house," he said. "Hereaway, on the

mainland to the right." He looked again, to make sure, at a dim little patch of white, with faint white lines behind it, nestling low in a grassy hollow, on the main island. "It looks like a stone house and enclosure," he resumed. "I'll hail it, on the chance." He passed his arm round a rope to steady himself; made a speaking-trumpet of his hands—and suddenly dropped them again without uttering a sound. "It's so awfully quiet," he whispered to himself. "I'm half afraid to call out." He looked down again on deck. "I shan't startle you, Midwinter—shall I?" he said, with an uneasy laugh. He looked once more at the faint white object in the grassy hollow. "It won't do to have come up here for nothing," he thought—and made a speaking-trumpet of his hands again. This time he gave the hail with the whole power of his lungs. "On shore there!" he shouted, turning his face to the main island. "Ahoy-hoy-hoy!"

The last echoes of his voice died away and were lost. No sound answered him but the cheerless bubbling of the broken water ahead.

He looked down again at his friend, and saw the dark figure of Midwinter rise erect, and pace the deck backwards and forwards—never disappearing out of sight of the cabin, when it retired towards the bows of the wreck; and never passing beyond the cabin, when it returned towards the stern. "He is impatient to get away," thought Allan; "I'll try again." He hailed the land once more; and, taught by previous experience, pitched his voice in its highest key, and nothing happened.

"Once more!" said he, looking down at the restless figure passing beneath him. For the third time he hailed the land. For the third time he waited and listened.

In a pause of silence among the cattle, he heard behind him, on the opposite shore of the channel—faint and far among the solitudes of the Islet of the Calf—a sharp, sudden sound, like the distant clash of a heavy door-bolt drawn back. Turning at once in the new direction, he strained his eyes to look for a house. The last faint rays of the waning moonlight trembled here and there on the higher rocks, and on the steeper pinnacles of ground—but great strips of darkness lay dense and black over all the land between; and in that darkness the house, if house there were, was lost to view.

"I have roused somebody at last," Allan called out encouragingly to Midwinter, still walking to and fro on the deck, strangely indifferent to all that was passing above and beyond him. "Look out for the answering hail!" And with his face set towards the islet, Allan shouted for help.

The shout was not answered, but mimicked with a shrill, shrieking derision—with wilder and wilder cries, rising out of the deep distant darkness, and mingling horribly the expression of a human voice with the sound of a brute's. A sudden suspicion crossed Allan's mind, which made his head swim and turned his hand cold as it held the rigging. In breathless silence he looked towards the quarter from which the first mimicry of his cry for help had come. After a moment's pause the shrieks were renewed, and the sound of them came nearer. Suddenly a figure, which seemed the figure of a man, leapt up black on a pinnacle of rock, and capered and shrieked in the waning gleam of the moonlight. The screams of a terrified woman mingled with the cries of the capering creature on the rock. A red spark flashed out in the darkness from a light kindled in an invisible window. The hoarse shouting of a man's voice in anger was heard through the noise. A second black figure leapt up on the rock, struggled with the first figure, and disappeared with it in the darkness. The cries grew fainter and fainter—the screams of the woman were stilled—the hoarse voice of the man was heard again for a moment, hailing the wreck in words made unintelligible by the distance, but in tones plainly expressive of rage and fear combined. Another moment, and the clang of the door-bolt was heard again; the red spark of light was quenched in darkness; and all the islet lay quiet in the shadows once more. The lowing of the cattle on the mainland ceased—rose again—stopped. Then, cold and cheerless as ever, the eternal bubbling of the broken water welled up through the great gap of silence—the one sound left, as the mysterious stillness of the hour fell like a mantle from the heavens, and closed over the wreck.

Allan descended from his place in the mizen-top, and joined his friend again on deck.

"We must wait till the ship-breakers come off to their work," he said, meeting Midwinter half-way in the course of his restless walk. "After what has happened, I don't mind confessing that I've had enough of hailing the land. Only think of there being a madman in that house ashore, and of my waking him! Horrible, wasn't it?"

Midwinter stood still for a moment, and looked at Allan, with the perplexed air of a man who hears circumstances familiarly mentioned, to which he is himself a total stranger. He appeared, if such a thing had been possible, to have passed over entirely without notice, all that had just happened on the Islet of the Calf.

"Nothing is horrible *out* of this ship," he said. "Everything is horrible *in* it."

Answering in those strange words, he turned away again, and went on with his walk.

Allan picked up the flask of whiskey lying on the deck near him, and revived his spirits with a dram. "Here's one thing on board that isn't horrible," he retorted briskly, as he screwed on the stopper of the flask; "and here's another," he added, as he took a cigar from his case and lit it. "Three o'clock!" he went on, looking at his watch, and settling himself comfortably on deck, with his back against the bulwark. "Daybreak isn't far off—we shall have the piping of the birds to cheer us up before long. I say, Midwinter, you seem to have quite got over that unlucky fainting fit. How you do keep walking! Come here and have a cigar, and make yourself comfortable. What's the good of tramping backwards and forwards in that restless way?"

"I am waiting," said Midwinter.

"Waiting! What for?"

"For what is to happen to you or to me—or to both of us—before we are out of this ship."

"With submission to your superior judgment, my dear fellow, I think quite enough has happened already. The adventure will do very well as it stands now; more of it is more than I want." He took another dram of whisky, and rambled on, between the puffs of his cigar, in his usual easy way. "I've not got your fine imagination, old boy; and I hope the next thing that happens will be the appearance of the workmen's boat. I suspect that queer fancy of yours has been running away with you, while you were down here all by yourself. Come now! what were you thinking of while I was up in the mizen-top frightening the cows?"

Midwinter suddenly stopped. "Suppose I tell you?" he said.

"Suppose you do?"

The torturing temptation to reveal the truth, roused once already by his companion's merciless gaiety of spirit, possessed itself of Midwinter for the second time. He leaned back in the dark against the high side of the ship, and looked down in silence at Allan's figure, stretched comfortably on the deck. "Rouse him," the fiend whispered subtly, "from that ignorant self-possession, and that pitiless repose. Show him the place where the deed was done; let him know it with your knowledge, and fear it with your dread. Tell him of the letter you burnt, and of the words no fire can destroy, which are living

in your memory now. Let him see your mind as it was yesterday, when it roused your sinking faith in your own convictions, to look back on your life at sea, and to cherish the comforting remembrance that, in all your voyages, you had never fallen in with this ship. Let him see your mind as it is now, when the ship has got you at the turning-point of your new life, at the outset of your friendship with the one man of all men whom your father warned you to avoid. Think of those death-bed words, and whisper them in his ear, that he may think of them too: 'Hide yourself from him under an assumed name. Put the mountains and the seas between you; be ungrateful, be unforgiving; be all that is most repellent to your own gentler nature, rather than live under the same roof and breathe the same air with that man.'" So the tempter counselled. So, like a noisome exhalation from the father's grave, the father's influence rose and poisoned the mind of the son.

The sudden silence surprised Allan; he looked back drowsily over his shoulder. "Thinking again!" he exclaimed, with a weary yawn.

Midwinter stepped out from the shadow, and came nearer to Allan than he had come yet. "Yes," he said, "thinking of the past and the future."

"The past and the future?" repeated Allan, shifting himself comfortably into a new position. "For my part I'm dumb about the past. It's a sore subject with me—the past means the loss of the doctor's boat. Let's talk about the future. Have you been taking a practical view? as dear old Brock calls it. Have you been considering the next serious question that concerns us both when we get back to the hotel —the question of breakfast?"

After an instant's hesitation, Midwinter took a step nearer. "I have been thinking of your future and mine," he said; "I have been thinking of the time when your way of life, and my way in life, will be two ways instead of one."

"Here's the daybreak!" cried Allan. "Look up at the masts; they're beginning to get clear again already. I beg your pardon. What were you saying?"

Midwinter made no reply. The struggle between the hereditary superstition that was driving him on, and the unconquerable affection for Allan that was holding him back, suspended the next words on his lips. He turned aside his face in speechless suffering. "Oh, my father!" he thought, "better have killed me on that day when I lay on your bosom, than have let me live for this."

Minute by minute the light strengthened in the eastern sky; and the shadowy places on the deck of the timber-ship revealed their barren emptiness under the eye of day. As the breeze rose again, the sea began to murmur wakefully in the morning light. Even the cold bubbling of the broken water changed its cheerless note, and softened on the ear as the mellowing flood of daylight poured warm over it from the rising sun. Midwinter paused near the forward part of the ship, and recalled his wandering attention to the passing time. The cheering influences of the hour were round him, look where he might. The happy morning smile of the summer sky, so brightly merciful to the old and weary earth, lavished its all-embracing beauty even on the wreck! The dew that lay glittering on the inland fields, lay glittering on the deck; and the worn and rusted rigging was gemmed as brightly as the fresh green leaves on shore. Insensibly, as he looked round, Midwinter's thoughts reverted to the comrade who had shared with him the adventure of the night. He returned to the after-part of the ship and spoke to Allan as he advanced. Receiving no answer, he approached the recumbent figure and looked closer at it. Left to his own resources, Allan had let the fatigues of the night take their own way with him. His head had sunk back; his hat had fallen off; he lay stretched at full length on the deck of the timber-ship, deeply and peacefully asleep.

Midwinter resumed his walk; his mind lost in doubt; his own past thoughts seeming suddenly to have grown strange to him. How darkly his forebodings had distrusted the coming time—and how harmlessly that time had come! The sun was mounting in the heavens, the hour of release was drawing nearer and nearer; and of the two Armadales imprisoned in the fatal ship, one was sleeping away the weary time, and the other was quietly watching the growth of the new day.

The sun climbed higher; the hour wore on. With the latent distrust of the wreck which still clung to him, Midwinter looked inquiringly on either shore for signs of awakening human life. The land was still lonely. The smoke-wreaths that were soon to rise from cottage chimneys, had not risen yet.

After a moment's thought he went back again to the after-part of the vessel, to see if there might be a fisherman's boat within hail, astern of them. Absorbed, for the moment, by the new idea, he passed Allan hastily, after barely noticing that he still lay asleep. One step more would have brought

him to the taffrail—when that step was suspended by a sound behind him, a sound like a faint groan. He turned, and looked at the sleeper on the deck. He knelt softly, and looked closer.

"It has come!" he whispered to himself. "Not to *me*—but to *him*."

It had come, in the bright freshness of the morning; it had come, in the mystery and terror of a Dream. The face which Midwinter had last seen in perfect repose, was now the distorted face of a suffering man. The perspiration stood thick on Allan's forehead, and matted his curling hair.

One question, and one only, rose in the mind of the man who was looking at him. What had the Fatality which had imprisoned him in the Wreck decreed that he should see?

The conflict between the sleeping body and the waking mind was strengthening every moment. The dreamer's helpless groaning for deliverance grew louder; his hands raised themselves, and clutched at the empty air. Struggling with the all-mastering dread that still held him, Midwinter laid his hand gently on Allan's forehead. Light as the touch was, there were mysterious sympathies in the dreaming man that answered it. His groaning ceased, and his hands dropped slowly. There was an instant of suspense, and Midwinter looked closer. His breath just fluttered over the sleeper's face. Before the next breath had risen to his lips, Allan suddenly sprang up on his knees—sprang up, as if the call of a trumpet had rung on his ear, awake in an instant.

"You have been dreaming," said Midwinter, as the other looked at him wildly, in the first bewilderment of waking.

Allan's eyes began to wander about the wreck—at first vacantly; then with a look of angry surprise. "Are we here still?" he said, as Midwinter helped him to his feet. "Whatever else I do on board this infernal ship," he added, after a moment, "I won't go to sleep again!"

As he said those words, his friend's eyes searched his face in silent inquiry. They took a turn together on the deck.

"Tell me your dream," said Midwinter, with a strange tone of suspicion in his voice, and a strange appearance of abruptness in his manner.

"I can't tell it yet," returned Allan. "Wait a little till I'm my own man again."

They took another turn on the deck. Midwinter stopped, and spoke once more.

"Is your head more composed?" he asked. "Can you tell me your dream now?"

While he put the question, a last memorable moment in the Adventure of the Wreck was at hand.

They had reached the stern, and were just turning again when Midwinter spoke. As Allan opened his lips to answer, he looked out mechanically to sea. Instead of replying, he suddenly ran to the taffrail, and waved his hat over his head, with a shout of exultation.

Midwinter joined him, and saw a large six-oared boat pulling straight for the channel of the Sound. A figure, which they both thought they recognised, rose eagerly in the stern-sheets, and returned the waving of Allan's hat. The boat came nearer; the steersman called to them cheerfully; and they recognised the doctor's voice.

"Thank God you're both above water!" said Mr. Hawbury, as they met him on the deck of the timber-ship. "Of all the winds of heaven, which wind blew you here?"

He looked at Midwinter, as he made the inquiry—but it was Allan who told him the story of the night; and Allan who asked the doctor for information in return. The one absorbing interest in Midwinter's mind—the interest of penetrating the mystery of the dream—kept him silent throughout. Heedless of all that was said or done about him, he watched Allan, and followed Allan, like a dog, until the time came for getting down into the boat. Mr. Hawbury's professional eye rested on him curiously, noting his varying colour, and the incessant restlessness of his hands. "I wouldn't change nervous systems with that man, for the largest fortune that could be offered me," thought the doctor as he took the boat's tiller, and gave the oarsmen their order to push off from the wreck.

Having reserved all explanations on his side until they were on their way back to Port St. Mary, Mr. Hawbury next addressed himself to the gratification of Allan's curiosity. After accounting for his welcome appearance on the scene, the doctor hospitably insisted that his guests of the evening should be his guests of the morning as well. It would still be too early when they got back for the people at the hotel to receive them, and they would find bed and breakfast at Mr. Hawbury's house.

At the first pause in the conversation between Allan and the doctor, Midwinter—who had neither joined in the talk, nor listened to the talk—touched his friend on the arm. "Are you better?" he asked in a whisper. "Shall you soon be composed enough to tell me what I want to know?"

Allan's eyebrows contracted impatiently; the subject of the dream, and Midwinter's obstinacy in returning to it, seemed

to be alike distasteful to him. He hardly answered with his usual good humour. "I suppose I shall have no peace till I tell you," he said, "so I may as well get it over at once."

"No!" returned Midwinter, with a look at the doctor and his oarsmen. "Not where other people can hear it—not till you and I are alone."

"If you wish to see the last, gentlemen, of your quarters for the night," interposed the doctor, "now is your time! the coast will shut the vessel out in a minute more."

In silence on the one side and on the other, the two Armadales looked their last at the fatal ship. Lonely and lost they had found the Wreck in the mystery of the summer night. Lonely and lost they left the Wreck in the radiant beauty of the summer morning.

CHAPTER V

THE SHADOW OF THE FUTURE

When Mr. Hawbury joined his guests in the breakfast-room, the strange contrast of character between them which he had noticed already, was impressed on his mind more strongly than ever. One of them sat at the well-spread table, hungry and happy; ranging from dish to dish, and declaring that he had never made such a breakfast in his life. The other sat apart at the window; his cup thanklessly deserted before it was empty, his meat left ungraciously half eaten on his plate. The doctor's morning greeting to the two accurately expressed the differing impressions which they had produced on his mind. He clapped Allan on the shoulder, and saluted him with a joke. He bowed constrainedly to Midwinter, and said: "I am afraid you have not recovered the fatigues of the night."

"It's not the night, doctor, that has damped his spirits," said Allan. "It's something I have been telling him. It is not my fault, mind. If I had only known beforehand that he believed in dreams, I wouldn't have opened my lips."

"Dreams?" repeated the doctor, looking at Midwinter directly, and addressing him under a mistaken impression of the meaning of Allan's words. "With your constitution, you ought to be well used to dreaming by this time."

"This way, doctor; you have taken the wrong turning!" cried Allan. "I'm the dreamer—not he. Don't look

astonished; it wasn't in this comfortable house—it was on board that confounded timber-ship. The fact is, I fell asleep just before you took us off the wreck; and it's not to be denied that I had a very ugly dream. Well, when we got back here——"

"Why do you trouble Mr. Hawbury about a matter that cannot possibly interest him?" asked Midwinter, speaking for the first time, and speaking very impatiently.

"I beg your pardon," returned the doctor, rather sharply; "so far as I have heard, the matter does interest me."

"That's right, doctor!" said Allan. "Be interested, I beg and pray; I want you to clear his head of the nonsense he has got in it now. What do you think?—he will have it that my dream is a warning to me to avoid certain people; and he actually persists in saying that one of those people is—himself! Did you ever hear the like of it? I took great pains; I explained the whole thing to him. I said, warning be hanged—it's all indigestion! You don't know what I ate and drank at the doctor's supper-table——I do. Do you think he would listen to me? Not he. You try him next; you're a professional man, and he must listen to you. Be a good fellow, doctor; and give me a certificate of indigestion; I'll show you my tongue with pleasure."

"The sight of your face is quite enough," said Mr. Hawbury. "I certify, on the spot, that you never had such a thing as an indigestion in your life. Let's hear about the dream, and see what we can make of it—if you have no objection, that is to say."

Allan pointed at Midwinter with his fork.

"Apply to my friend, there," he said; "he has got a much better account of it than I can give you. If you'll believe me, he took it all down in writing from my own lips; and he made me sign it at the end, as if it was my 'last dying speech and confession', before I went to the gallows. Out with it, old boy—I saw you put it in your pocket-book—out with it!"

"Are you really in earnest?" asked Midwinter, producing his pocket-book with a reluctance which was almost offensive under the circumstances, for it implied distrust of the doctor in the doctor's own house.

Mr. Hawbury's colour rose. "Pray don't show it to me, if you feel the least unwillingness," he said, with the elaborate politeness of an offended man.

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Allan. "Throw it over here!"

Instead of complying with that characteristic request, Midwinter took the paper from the pocket-book, and, leaving his

place, approached Mr. Hawbury. "I beg your pardon," he said, as he offered the doctor the manuscript with his own hand. His eyes dropped to the ground, and his face darkened, while he made the apology. "A secret, sullen fellow," thought the doctor, thanking him with formal civility—"his friend is worth ten thousand of him."

He spread the manuscript before him on the breakfast-table, and read these lines:

"ALLAN ARMADALE'S DREAM

"Early on the morning of June the first, eighteen hundred and fifty-one, I found myself (through circumstances which it is not important to mention in this place) left alone with a friend of mine—a young man about my own age—on board the French timber-ship named *La Grâce de Dieu*, which ship then lay wrecked in the channel of the Sound, between the mainland of the Isle of Man and the islet called the Calf. Having not been in bed the previous night, and feeling overcome by fatigue, I fell asleep on the deck of the vessel. I was in my usual good health at the time, and the morning was far enough advanced for the sun to have risen. Under these circumstances, and at that period of the day, I passed from sleeping to dreaming. As clearly as I can recollect it, after the lapse of a few hours, this was the succession of events presented to me by the dream:

"1. The first event of which I was conscious, was the appearance of my father. He took me silently by the hand; and we found ourselves in the cabin of a ship.

"2. Water rose slowly over us in the cabin; and I and my father sank through the water together.

"3. An interval of oblivion followed; and then the sense came to me of being left alone in the darkness.

"4. I waited.

"5. The darkness opened, and showed me the vision—as in a picture—of a broad, lonely pool, surrounded by open ground. Above the farther margin of the pool, I saw the cloudless western sky, red with the light of sunset.

"6. On the near margin of the pool, there stood the Shadow of a Woman.

"7. It was the shadow only. No indication was visible to me by which I could identify it, or compare it with any living creature. The long robe showed me that it was the shadow of a woman, and showed me nothing more.

"8. The darkness closed again—remained with me for an interval—and opened for the second time.

"9. I found myself in a room, standing before a long window. The only object of furniture or of ornament that I saw (or that I can now remember having seen), was a little statue placed near me. The window opened on a lawn and flower-garden; and the rain was pattering heavily against the glass.

"10. I was not alone in the room. Standing opposite to me at the window was the Shadow of a Man.

"11. I saw no more of it—I knew no more of it than I saw and knew of the shadow of the woman. But the shadow of the man moved. It stretched out its arm towards the statue; and the statue fell in fragments on the floor.

"12. With a confused sensation in me, which was partly anger and partly distress, I stooped to look at the fragments. When I rose again, the Shadow had vanished and I saw no more.

"13. The darkness opened for the third time, and showed me the Shadow of the Woman and the Shadow of the Man together.

"14. No surrounding scene (or none that I can now call to mind) was visible to me.

"15. The Man-Shadow was the nearest; the Woman-Shadow stood back. From where she stood, there came a sound as of the pouring of a liquid softly. I saw her touch the shadow of the man with one hand, and with the other give him a glass. He took the glass, and gave it to me. In the moment when I put it to my lips, a deadly faintness mastered me from head to foot. When I came to my senses again, the Shadows had vanished, and the third vision was at an end.

"16. The darkness closed over me again; and the interval of oblivion followed.

"17. I was conscious of nothing more, till I felt the morning sunshine on my face, and heard my friend tell me that I had awakened from a dream."

After reading the narrative attentively to the last line (under which appeared Allan's signature), the doctor looked across the breakfast-table at Midwinter, and tapped his fingers on the manuscript with a satirical smile.

"Many men, many opinions," he said. "I don't agree with either of you about this dream. Your theory," he added, looking at Allan, with a smile, "we have disposed of already:

the supper that *you* can't digest, is a supper which has yet to be discovered. My theory we will come to presently; your friend's theory claims attention first." He turned again to Midwinter, with his anticipated triumph over a man whom he disliked a little too plainly visible in his face and manner. "If I understood rightly," he went on, "you believe that this dream is a warning, supernaturally addressed to Mr. Armadale, of dangerous events that are threatening him, and of dangerous people connected with those events, whom he would do wisely to avoid. May I inquire whether you have arrived at this conclusion, as an habitual believer in dreams?—or, as having reasons of your own for attaching especial importance to this one dream in particular?"

"You have stated what my conviction is quite accurately," returned Midwinter, chafing under the doctor's looks and tones. "Excuse me if I ask you to be satisfied with that admission, and to let me keep my reasons to myself."

"That's exactly what he said to me," interposed Allan. "I don't believe he has got any reasons at all."

"Gently! gently!" said Mr. Hawbury. "We can discuss the subject, without intruding ourselves into anybody's secrets. Let us come to my own method of dealing with the dream next. Mr. Midwinter will probably not be surprised to hear that I look at this matter from an essentially practical point of view."

"I shall not be at all surprised," retorted Midwinter. "The view of a medical man, when he has a problem in humanity to solve, seldom ranges beyond the point of his dissecting-knife."

The doctor was a little nettled on his side. "Our limits are not quite so narrow as that," he said; "but I willingly grant you that there are some articles of your faith in which we doctors don't believe. For example, we don't believe that a reasonable man is justified in attaching a supernatural interpretation to any phenomenon which comes within the range of his senses, until he has certainly ascertained that there is no such thing as a natural explanation of it to be found in the first instance."

"Come; that's fair enough, I'm sure," exclaimed Allan. "He hit you hard with the 'dissecting-knife', doctor; and now you have hit him back again with your 'natural explanation'. Let's have it."

"Let us take the events of the dream in their regular order," said the doctor, "and ask the questions that naturally suggest themselves as we go on. Here are the

first two events to begin with. You dream that your father appears to you—that you and he find yourselves in the cabin of a ship—that the water rises over you, and that you sink in it together. Were you down in the cabin of the wreck, may I ask?"

"I couldn't be down there," replied Allan, "as the cabin was full of water. I looked in and saw it, and shut the door again."

"Very good," said Mr. Hawbury. "Here are the waking impressions clear enough, so far. You have had the cabin in your mind; and you have had the water in your mind; and the sound of the channel current (as I well know without asking) was the last sound in your ears when you went to sleep. The idea of drowning comes too naturally out of such impressions as these to need dwelling on. Is there anything else before we go on? Yes; there is one more circumstance left to account for."

"The most important circumstance of all," remarked Midwinter, joining in the conversation, without stirring from his place at the window.

"You mean the appearance of Mr. Armadale's father? I was just coming to that," answered Mr. Hawbury. "Is your father alive?" he added, addressing himself to Allan once more."

"My father died before I was born."

The doctor started. "This complicates it a little," he said. "How did you know that the figure appearing to you in the dream was the figure of your father?"

Allan hesitated again. Midwinter drew his chair a little away from the window, and looked at the doctor attentively for the first time.

"Was your father in your thoughts before you went to sleep?" pursued Mr. Hawbury. "Was there any description of him—any portrait of him at home—in your mind?"

"Of course there was!" cried Allan, suddenly seizing the lost recollection. "Midwinter! you remember the miniature you found on the floor of the cabin when we were putting the yacht to rights? You said I didn't seem to value it; and I told you I did, because it was a portrait of my father——"

"And was the face in the dream like the face in the miniature?" asked Mr. Hawbury.

"Exactly like! I say, doctor, this is beginning to get interesting!"

"Let us get on to the next sets of events," Mr. Hawbury resumed, after referring for a moment to the manuscript.

"The interval of oblivion which is described as succeeding the first of the appearances in the dream, may be easily disposed of. It means, in plain English, the momentary cessation of the brain's intellectual action, while a deeper wave of sleep flows over it, just as the sense of being alone in the darkness, which follows, indicates the renewal of that action, previous to the reproduction of another set of impressions. Let us see what they are. A lonely pool, surrounded by an open country; a sunset sky on the farther side of the pool; and the shadow of a woman on the near side. Very good; now for it, Mr. Armadale! How did that pool get into your head? The open country you saw on your way from Castletown to this place. But we have no pools or lakes hereabouts; and you can have seen none recently elsewhere, for you came here after a cruise at sea. Must we fall back on a picture, or a book, or a conversation with your friend?"

Allan looked at Midwinter. "I don't remember talking about pools, or lakes," he said. "Do you?"

Instead of answering the question, Midwinter suddenly appealed to the doctor.

"Have you got the last number of the Manx newspaper?" he asked.

The doctor produced it from the sideboard. Midwinter turned to the page containing those extracts from the recently published Travels in Australia, which had roused Allan's interest on the previous evening, and the reading of which had ended by sending his friend to sleep. There—in the passage describing the sufferings of the travellers from thirst, and the subsequent discovery which saved their lives—there, appearing at the climax of the narrative, was the broad pool of water which had figured in Allan's dream!"

"Don't put away the paper," said the doctor, when Midwinter had shown it to him, with the necessary explanation. "Before we are at the end of the inquiry, it is quite possible we may want that extract again. We have got at the pool. How about the sunset? Nothing of that sort is referred to in the newspaper extract. Search your memory again, Mr. Armadale; we want your waking impressions of a sunset, if you please."

Once more, Allan was at a loss for an answer; and, once more, Midwinter's ready memory helped him through the difficulty.

"I think I can trace our way back to this impression, as I traced our way back to the other," he said, addressing the

doctor. "After we got here yesterday afternoon, my friend and I took a long walk over the hills——"

"That's it!" interposed Allan. "I remember. The sun was setting as we came back to the hotel for supper—and it was such a splendid red sky, we both stopped to look at it. And then we talked about Mr. Brock, and wondered how far he had got on his journey home. My memory may be a slow one at starting, doctor; but when it's once set going, stop it if you can! I haven't half done yet."

"Wait one minute, in mercy to Mr. Midwinter's memory and mine," said the doctor. "We have traced back to your waking impressions, the vision of the open country, the pool, and the sunset. But the Shadow of the Woman has not been accounted for yet. Can you find us the original of this mysterious figure in the dream-landscape?"

Allan relapsed into his former perplexity, and Midwinter waited for what was to come, with his eyes fixed in breathless interest on the doctor's face. For the first time there was unbroken silence in the room.

"Patience," said the doctor, composedly. "Let us leave the figure by the pool for the present, and try if we can't pick her up again as we go on. Allow me to observe, Mr. Midwinter, that it is not very easy to identify a shadow; but we won't despair. This impalpable lady of the lake may take some consistency when we next meet with her."

Midwinter made no reply. From that moment his interest in the inquiry began to flag.

"What is the next scene in the dream?" pursued Mr. Hawbury, referring to the manuscript. "Mr. Armadale finds himself in a room. He is standing before a long window opening on a lawn and flower-garden, and the rain is pattering against the glass. The only thing he sees in the room is a little statue; and the only company he has is the Shadow of a Man standing opposite to him. The Shadow stretches out its arm, and the statue falls in fragments on the floor; and the dreamer, in anger and distress at the catastrophe (observe, gentlemen, that here the sleeper's reasoning faculty wakes up a little, and the dream passes rationally, for a moment, from cause to effect), stoops to look at the broken pieces. When he looks up again the scene has vanished. That is to say, in the ebb and flow of sleep, it is the turn of the flow now, and the brain rests a little. What's the matter, Mr. Armadale? Has that restive memory of yours run away with you again?"

"Yes," said Allan. "I'm off at full gallop. I've run the broken statue to earth; it's nothing more nor less than a china

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shepherdess I knocked off the mantelpiece in the hotel coffee-room, when I rang the bell for supper last night. I say, how well we get on; don't we? It's like guessing a riddle. Now then, Midwinter! your turn next."

"No!" said the doctor. "My turn, if you please. I claim the long window, the garden, and the lawn, as my property. You will find the long window, Mr. Armadale, in the next room. If you look out, you'll see the garden and lawn in front of it—and, if you'll exert that wonderful memory of yours, you will recollect that you were good enough to take special and complimentary notice of my smart French window and my neat garden, when I drove you and your friend to Port St. Mary yesterday."

"Quite right," rejoined Allan, "so I did. But what about the rain that fell in the dream? I haven't seen a drop of rain for the last week."

Mr. Hawbury hesitated. The Manx newspaper which had been left on the table caught his eye. "If we can think of nothing else," he said, "let us try if we can't find the idea of the rain where we found the idea of the pool." He looked through the extract carefully. "I have got it!" he exclaimed. "Here is rain described as having fallen on these thirsty Australian travellers, before they discovered the pool. Behold the shower, Mr. Armadale, which got into your mind when you read the extract to your friend last night! And behold the dream, Mr. Midwinter, mixing up separate waking impressions just as usual!"

"Can you find the waking impression which accounts for the human figure at the window?" asked Midwinter; "or, are we to pass over the Shadow of the Man as we have passed over the Shadow of the Woman already?"

He put the question with scrupulous courtesy of manner, but with a tone of sarcasm in his voice which caught the doctor's ear, and set up the doctor's controversial bristles on the instant.

"When you are picking up shells on the beach, Mr. Midwinter, you usually begin with the shells that lie nearest at hand," he rejoined. He turned back to Allan. "Do you remember what happened, when you and I were gossiping with the landlady at the bar of the hotel last night?"

"Of course I do! You were kind enough to hand me a glass of brandy-and-water, which the landlady had just mixed for your own drinking. And I was obliged to refuse it because, as I told you, the taste of brandy always turns me sick and faint, mix it how you please."

"Exactly so," returned the doctor. "And here is the incident reproduced in the dream. You see the man's shadow and the woman's shadow together this time. You hear the pouring out of liquid (brandy from the hotel bottle, and water from the hotel jug); the glass is handed by the woman-shadow (the landlady) to the man-shadow (myself); the man-shadow hands it to you (exactly what I did); and the faintness (which you had previously described to me) follows in due course. I am shocked to identify these mysterious Appearances, Mr. Midwinter, with such miserably unromantic originals as a woman who keeps an hotel, and a man who physics a country district. But your friend himself will tell you that the glass of brandy-and-water was prepared by the landlady, and that it reached him by passing from her hand to mine. We have picked up the shadows and we have only to account now—which may be done in two words—for the manner of their appearance in the dream. After having tried to introduce the waking impression of the doctor and the landlady separately, in connection with the wrong set of circumstances, the dreaming mind comes right at the third trial, and introduces the doctor and the landlady together, in connection with the right set of circumstances. There it is in a nutshell!—Permit me to hand you back the manuscript, with my best thanks for your very complete and striking confirmation of the rational theory of dreams." Saying those words, Mr. Hawbury returned the written paper to Midwinter, with the pitiless politeness of a conquering man.

"You have not convinced *me*," said Midwinter. "But I don't presume on that account to say that you are wrong."

"Do you admit," asked the doctor, more pugnaciously than ever, "that I have traced back every event of the dream to a waking impression which preceded it in Mr. Armadale's mind?"

"I have no wish to deny that you have done so," said Midwinter, resignedly.

"Have I identified the Shadows with their living originals?"

"You have identified them to your own satisfaction, and to my friend's satisfaction. Not to mine."

"Not to yours?" Can *you* identify them?"

"No. I can only wait till the living originals stand revealed in the future."

"Spoken like an oracle, Mr. Midwinter! Have you any idea at present of who those living originals may be?"

"I have. I believe that coming events will identify the

Shadow of the Woman with a person whom my friend has not met with yet; and the Shadow of the Man with myself."

Allan attempted to speak. The doctor stopped him.

"Let us clearly understand this," he said to Midwinter. "Leaving your own case out of the question for the moment, may I ask how a shadow, which has no distinguishing mark about it, is to be identified with a living woman, whom your friend doesn't know?"

Midwinter's colour rose a little. He began to feel the lash of the doctor's logic.

"The landscape-picture of the dream has its distinguishing marks," he replied. "And, in that landscape, the living woman will appear when the living woman is first seen."

"The same thing will happen, I suppose," pursued the doctor, "with the man-shadow which you persist in identifying with yourself. You will be associated in the future with a statue broken in your friend's presence, with a long window looking out on a garden, and with a shower of rain pattering against the glass? Do you say that?"

"I say that."

"And so again, I presume, with the next vision? You and the mysterious woman will be brought together in some place now unknown, and will present to Mr. Armadale some liquid yet unnamed, which will turn him faint?—Do you seriously tell me you believe this?"

"I seriously tell you I believe it."

"And, according to your view, these fulfilments of the dream will mark the progress of certain coming events, in which Mr. Armadale's happiness, or Mr. Armadale's safety, will be dangerously involved?"

"That is my firm conviction."

The doctor rose—laid aside his moral dissecting-knife—considered for a moment—and took it up again.

"One last question," he said. "Have you any reason to give for going out of your way to adopt such a mystical view as this, when an unanswerably rational explanation of the dream lies straight before you?"

"No reason," replied Midwinter, "that I can give, either to you or to my friend."

The doctor looked at his watch with the air of a man who is suddenly reminded that he has been wasting his time.

"We have no common ground to start from," he said; "and if we talked till doomsday, we should not agree. Excuse my leaving you rather abruptly. It is later than I thought; and my morning's batch of sick people are waiting for me in

the surgery. I have convinced *your* mind, Mr. Armadale, at any rate; so the time we have given to this discussion has not been altogether lost. Pray stop here, and smoke your cigar. I shall be at your service again in less than an hour." He nodded cordially to Allan, bowed formally to Midwinter, and quitted the room.

As soon as the doctor's back was turned, Allan left his place at the table, and appealed to his friend, with that irresistible heartiness of manner which had always found its way to Midwinter's sympathies, from the first day when they met at the Somersetshire inn.

"Now the sparring-match between you and the doctor is over," said Allan, "I have got two words to say on my side. Will you do something for my sake which you won't do for your own?"

Midwinter's face brightened instantly. "I will do anything you ask me," he said.

"Very well. Will you let the subject of the dream drop out of our talk altogether, from this time forth?"

"Yes, if you wish it."

"Will you go a step further? Will you leave off thinking about the dream?"

"It's hard to leave off thinking about it, Allan. But I will try."

"That's a good fellow! Now give me that trumpery bit of paper, and let's tear it up, and have done with it."

He tried to snatch the manuscript out of his friend's hand; but Midwinter was too quick for him, and kept it beyond his reach.

"Come! come!" pleaded Allan. "I've set my heart on lighting my cigar with it."

Midwinter hesitated painfully. It was hard to resist Allan; but he did resist him. "I'll wait a little," he said, "before you light your cigar with it."

"How long? Till to-morrow?"

"Longer."

"Till we leave the Isle of Man?"

"Longer."

"Hang it—give me a plain answer to a plain question! How long *will* you wait?"

Midwinter carefully restored the paper to its place in his pocket-book.

"I'll wait," he said, "till we get to Thorpe-Ambrose."

THE END OF THE FIRST BOOK

BOOK THE SECOND

CHAPTER I

LURKING MISCHIEF

I.—*From Mrs. Oldershaw to Miss Gwilt*

"Ladies' Toilette Repository, Diana Street, Pimlico: Wednesday.

"MY DEAR LYDIA;—To save the post, I write to you, after a long day's worry at my place of business, on the business letter-paper, having news since we last met, which it seems advisable to send you at the earliest opportunity.

"To begin at the beginning. After carefully considering the thing, I am quite sure you will do wisely with young Armadale if you hold your tongue about Madeira and all that happened there. Your position was, no doubt, a very strong one with his mother. You had privately helped her in playing a trick on her own father—you had been ungratefully dismissed, at a pitiably tender age, as soon as you had served her purpose—and when you came upon her suddenly, after a separation of more than twenty years, you found her in failing health, with a grown-up son, whom she had kept in total ignorance of the true story of her marriage.

"Have you any such advantages as these with the young gentleman who has survived her? If he is not a born idiot, he will decline to believe your shocking aspersions on the memory of his mother; and—seeing that you have no proofs at this distance of time to meet him with—there is an end of your money-grubbing in the golden Armadale diggings. Mind! I don't dispute that the old lady's heavy debt of obligation, after what you did for her in Madeira, is not paid yet; and that the son is the next person to settle with you, now the mother has slipped through your fingers. Only squeeze him the right way, my dear, that's what I venture to suggest——squeeze him the right way.

"And which is the right way? That question brings me to my news.

"Have you thought again of that other notion of yours of trying your hand on this lucky young gentleman, with nothing but your own good looks and your own quick wits to help

you? The idea hung on my mind so strangely after you were gone, that it ended in my sending a little note to my lawyer, to have the will under which young Armadale has got his fortune examined at Doctors' Commons. The result turns out to be something infinitely more encouraging than either you or I could possibly have hoped for. After the lawyer's report to me, there cannot be a moment's doubt of what you ought to do. In two words, Lydia, take the bull by the horns—and marry him!!!

"I am quite serious. He is much better worth the venture than you suppose. Only persuade him to make you Mrs. Armadale, and you may set all after-discoveries at flat defiance. As long as he lives, you can make your own terms with him; and, if he dies, the will entitles you, in spite of anything he can say or do—with children, or without them—to an income, chargeable on his estate, of *twelve hundred a year for life*. There is no doubt about this—the lawyer himself has looked at the will. Of course Mr. Blanchard had his son, and his son's widow in his eye, when he made the provision. But, as it is not limited to any one heir by name, and not revoked anywhere, it now holds as good with young Armadale as it would have held under other circumstances with Mr. Blanchard's son. What a chance for you, after all the miseries and the dangers you have gone through, to be mistress of Thorpe-Ambrose, if he lives; to have an income for life, if he dies! Hook him, my poor dear; hook him at any sacrifice.

"I daresay you will make the same objection when you read this, which you made when we were talking about it the other day—I mean the objection of your age.

"Now, my good creature, just listen to me. The question is—not whether you were five-and-thirty last birthday; we will own the dreadful truth, and say you were—but whether you do look, or don't look, your real age. My opinion on this matter ought to be, and is, one of the best opinions in London. I have had twenty years' experience among our charming sex in making up battered old faces and worn-out old figures to look like new——and I say positively you don't look a day over thirty, if as much. If you will follow my advice about dressing, and use one or two of my applications privately, I guarantee to put you back three years more. I will forfeit all the money I shall have to advance for you in this matter, if, when I have ground you young again in my wonderful mill, you look more than seven-and-twenty in any man's eyes living ——except, of course, when you wake anxious in the small

hours of the morning; and then, my dear, you will be old and ugly in the retirement of your own room, and it won't matter.

"'But,' you may say, 'supposing all this, here I am, even with your art to help me, looking a good six years older than he is; and that is against me at starting.' Is it? Just think again. Surely, your own experience must have shown you that the commonest of all common weaknesses, in young fellows of this Armadale's age, is to fall in love with women older than themselves? Who are the men who really appreciate us in the bloom of our youth (I'm sure I have cause to speak well of the bloom of youth; I made fifty guineas to-day by putting it on the spotted shoulders of a woman old enough to be your mother)—who are the men, I say, who are ready to worship us when we are mere babies of seventeen? The gay young gentlemen in the bloom of their own youth? No! The cunning old wretches who are on the wrong side of forty.

"And what is the moral of this, as the story-books say?

"The moral is that the chances, with such a head as you have got on your shoulders, are all in your favour. If you feel your present forlorn position, as I believe you do; if you know what a charming woman (in the men's eyes) you can still be, when you please; and if all your old resolution has really come back, after that shocking outbreak of desperation on board the steamer (natural enough, I own, under the dreadful provocation laid on you), you will want no further persuasion from me to try this experiment. Only to think of how things turn out! If the other young booby had not jumped into the river after you, *this* young booby would never have had the estate. It really looks as if fate had determined that you were to be Mrs. Armadale, of Thorpe-Ambrose—and who can control his fate, as the poet says?

"Send me one line to say Yes or No; and believe me

"Your attached old friend,

"MARIA OLDERSHAW."

2.—*From Miss Gwilt to Mrs. Oldershaw*

"Richmond, Thursday.

"YOU OLD WRETCH—I won't say Yes or No till I have had a long, long look at my glass first. If you had any real regard for anybody but your wicked old self, you would know that

the bare idea of marrying again (after what I have gone through) is an idea that makes my flesh creep.

"But there can be no harm in your sending me a little more information, while I am making up my mind. You have got twenty pounds of mine still left out of those things you sold for me: send ten pounds here for my expenses, in a post office order, and use the other ten for making private inquiries at Thorpe-Ambrose. I want to know when the two Blanchard women go away, and when young Armadale stirs up the dead ashes in the family fireplace. Are you quite sure he will turn out as easy to manage as you think? If he takes after his hypocrite of a mother, I can tell you this—Judas Iscariot has come to life again.

"I am very comfortable in this lodging. There are lovely flowers in the garden, and the birds wake me in the morning delightfully. I have hired a reasonably good piano. The only man I care two straws about—don't be alarmed; he was laid in his grave many a long year ago, under the name of BEETHOVEN—keeps me company, in my lonely hours. The landlady would keep me company, too, if I would only let her. I hate women. The new curate paid a visit to the other lodger yesterday, and passed me on the lawn as he came out. My eyes have lost nothing yet, at any rate, though I *am* five-and-thirty; the poor man actually blushed when I looked at him! What sort of colour do you think he would have turned, if one of the little birds in the garden had whispered in his ear, and told him the true story of the charming Miss Gwilt?

"Good-bye, Mother Oldershaw. I rather doubt whether I am yours, or anybody's, affectionately; but we all tell lies at the bottom of our letters, don't we? If you are my attached old friend, I must of course be

"Yours affectionately,

"LYDIA GWILT.

"P.S.—Keep your odious powders and paints and washes for the spotted shoulders of your customers; not one of them shall touch my skin, I promise you. If you really want to be useful, try and find out some quieting draught to keep me from grinding my teeth in my sleep. I shall break them one of these nights; and then what will become of my beauty, I wonder?"

3.—*From Mrs. Oldershaw to Miss Gwilt*

"Ladies' Toilette Repository, Tuesday.

"MY DEAR LYDIA,—An hour after I got your letter, I set the inquiries on foot. Not knowing what consequences they might lead to, I thought it safest to begin in the dark. Instead of employing any of the people whom I have at my own disposal (who know you and know me), I went to the Private Inquiry Office in Shadyside Place, and put the matter in the inspector's hands, in the character of a perfect stranger, and without mentioning you at all. This was not the cheapest way of going to work, I own; but it was the safest way, which is of much greater consequence.

"The inspector and I understood each other in ten minutes; and the right person for the purpose—the most harmless-looking young man you ever saw in your life—was produced immediately. He left for Thorpe-Ambrose an hour after I saw him. I arranged to call at the office on the afternoons of Saturday, Monday, and to-day, for news. There was no news till to-day—and there I found our Confidential Agent just returned to town, and waiting to favour me with a full account of his trip to Norfolk.

"First of all, let me quiet your mind about those two questions of yours; I have got answers to both the one and the other. The Blanchard women go away to foreign parts on the thirteenth; and young Armadale is at this moment cruising somewhere at sea in his yacht. There is talk at Thorpe-Ambrose of giving him a public reception, and of calling a meeting of the local grandees to settle it all. The speechifying and fuss on these occasions generally wastes plenty of time; and the public reception is not thought likely to meet the new Squire much before the end of the month.

"If our messenger had done no more for us than this, I think he would have earned his money. But the harmless young man is a regular Jesuit at a private inquiry.

"Having to get his information through the female servants, in the usual way, he addressed himself, with admirable discretion, to the ugliest woman in the house. 'When they are nice-looking, and can pick and choose,' as he neatly expressed it to me, 'they waste a great deal of valuable time in deciding on a sweetheart. When they are ugly, and haven't got the ghost of a chance of choosing, they snap at a sweetheart, if he comes their way, like a starved dog at a bone.' Acting on these excellent principles, our Confidential Agent succeeded, after certain unavoidable delays, in addressing himself to the upper housemaid at Thorpe-Ambrose, and took full possession

of her confidence at the first interview. Bearing his instructions carefully in mind, he encouraged the woman to chatter, and was favoured, of course, with all the gossip of the servants' hall. The greater part of it (as repeated to me) was of no earthly importance. But I listened patiently, and was rewarded by a valuable discovery at last. Here it is.

"It seems there is an ornamental cottage in the grounds at Thorpe-Ambrose. For some reason unknown, young Armadale has chosen to let it; and a tenant has come in already. He is a poor half-pay major in the army, named Milroy—a meek sort of man, by all accounts, with a turn for occupying himself in mechanical pursuits, and with a domestic incumbrance in the shape of a bed-ridden wife, who has not been seen by anybody. Well, and what of all this? you will ask, with that sparkling impatience which becomes you so well. My dear Lydia, don't sparkle! The man's family affairs seriously concern us both—for, as ill-luck will have it, the man has got a daughter!

She is a minx just turned sixteen; lively and nice-looking (hateful little wretch!), dowdy in her dress (thank heaven!), and deficient in her manners (thank heaven again!). She has been brought up at home. The governess who last had charge of her, left before her father moved to Thorpe-Ambrose. Her education stands woefully in want of a finishing touch, and the major doesn't quite know what to do next. None of his friends can recommend him a new governess, and he doesn't like the notion of sending the girl to school. So matters rest at present, on the major's own showing—for so the major expressed himself at a morning call which the father and daughter paid to the ladies at the great house.

"You have now got my promised news, and you will have little difficulty, I think, in agreeing with me, that the Armadale business must be settled at once, one way or the other. If, with your hopeless prospects, and with what I may call your family claim on this young fellow, you decide on giving him up, I shall have the pleasure of sending you the balance of your account with me (seven-and-twenty shillings), and shall then be free to devote myself entirely to my own proper business. If, on the contrary, you decide to try your luck at Thorpe-Ambrose, then (there being no kind of doubt that the major's minx will set her cap at the young squire) I should be glad to hear how you mean to meet the double difficulty of inflaming Mr. Armadale and extinguishing Miss Milroy.

"Affectionately yours,

"MARIA OLDERSHAW."

4.—*From Miss Gwilt to Mrs. Oldershaw.* (*First Answer.*)

"Richmond, Wednesday Morning.

"MRS. OLDERSHAW,—Send me my seven-and-twenty shillings, and devote yourself to your own proper business.

"Yours, L. G."

5.—*From Miss Gwilt to Mrs. Oldershaw.* (*Second Answer.*)

"Richmond, Wednesday Night.

"DEAR OLD LOVE,—Keep the seven-and-twenty shillings, and burn my other letter. I have changed my mind.

"I wrote the first time, after a horrible night. I write, this time, after a ride on horseback, a tumbler of claret, and the breast of a chicken. Is that explanation enough? Please say Yes—for I want to go back to my piano.

"No; I can't go back yet—I must answer your question first. But are you really so very simple as to suppose that I don't see straight through you and your letter? You know that the major's difficulty is our opportunity as well as I do; but you want me to take the responsibility of making the first proposal; don't you? Suppose I take it in your own round-about way? Suppose I say—'Pray don't ask me how I propose inflaming Mr. Armadale and extinguishing Miss Milroy; the question is so shockingly abrupt I really can't answer it. ask me, instead, if it's the modest ambition of my life to become Miss Milroy's governess?' Yes, if you please, Mrs. Oldershaw—and if you will assist me by becoming my reference.

"There it is for you! If some serious disaster happens (which is quite possible), what a comfort it will be to remember that it was all my fault!

"Now I have done this for you, will you do something for me. I want to dream away the little time I am likely to have left here, in my own way. Be a merciful Mother Oldershaw, and spare me the worry of looking at the Ins and Outs, and adding up the chances For and Against, in this new venture of mine. Think for me, in short, until I am obliged to think for myself.

"I had better not write any more, or I shall say something savage that you won't like. I am in one of my tempers

to-night. I want a husband to vex, or a child to beat, or something of that sort. Do you ever like to see the summer insects kill themselves in the candle? I do, sometimes. Good-night, Mrs. Jezebel. The longer you can leave me here the better. The air agrees with me, and I am looking charmingly.

"L. G."

CHAPTER II

ALLAN AS A LANDED GENTLEMAN

Early on the morning after his first night's rest at Thorpe-Ambrose, Allan rose and surveyed the prospect from his bedroom window, lost in the dense mental bewilderment of feeling himself to be a stranger in his own house.

Arrived in the hall, the new master of Thorpe-Ambrose hesitated, and looked about him, uncertain which way to turn next.

The four reception-rooms on the ground floor opened into the hall, two on either side. Allan tried the nearest door on his right hand at a venture, and found himself in the drawing-room. Here the first sign of life appeared, under life's most attractive form. A young girl was in solitary possession of the drawing-room. The duster in her hand appeared to associate her with the domestic duties of the house; but at that particular moment she was occupied in asserting the rights of nature over the obligations of service. In other words, she was attentively contemplating her own face in the glass over the mantel-piece.

"There! there! don't let me frighten you," said Allan, as the girl started away from the glass, and stared at him in unutterable confusion. "I quite agree with you my dear; your face is well worth looking at. Who are you?—oh, the housemaid. And what's your name? Susan, eh? Come! I like your name to begin with. Do you know who I am, Susan? I'm your master, though you may not think it. Your character? Oh, yes! Mrs. Blanchard gave you a capital character. You shall stop here; don't be afraid. And you'll be a good girl, Susan, and wear smart little caps and aprons and bright ribbons, and you'll look nice and pretty, and dust the furniture, won't you?"

With this summary of a housemaid's duties, Allan

sauntered back into the hall, and found more signs of life in that quarter. A man-servant appeared on this occasion, and bowed, as became a vassal in a linen jacket, before his liege lord in a wide-awake hat.

"And who may you be?" asked Allan. "Not the man who let us in last night? Ah, I thought not. The second footman, eh? Character? Oh, yes; capital character. Stop here, of course. You can valet me, can you? Bother valeting me! I like to put on my own clothes, and brush them, too, when they *are* on; and, if I only knew how to black my own boots, by George I should like to do it! What room's this? Morning-room, eh? And here's the dining-room, of course. Good heavens, what a table! it's as long as my yacht, and longer. I say—by-the-by, what's your name? Richard, is it? —well, Richard, the vessel I sail in is a vessel of my own building! What do you think of that? You look to me just the right sort of man to be my steward on board. If you're not sick at sea—oh you *are* sick at sea? Well, then, we'll say nothing more about it. And what room is this? Ah, yes; the library, of course—more in Mr. Midwinter's way than mine. Mr. Midwinter is the gentleman who came here with me last night; and mind this, Richard, you're all to show him as much attention as you show me. Where are we now? What's this door at the back? Billiard-room and smoking-room, eh? Jolly. Another door! and more stairs! Where do they go to? and who's this coming up? Take your time, ma'am; you're not quite so young as you were once—take your time."

The object of Allan's humane caution was a corpulent elderly woman of the type called "motherly." Fourteen stairs were all that separated her from the master of the house: she ascended them with fourteen stoppages and fourteen sighs. Nature, various in all things, is infinitely various in the female sex. There are some women whose personal qualities reveal the Loves and the Graces; and there are other women whose personal qualities suggest the Perquisites and the Grease Pot. This was one of the other women.

"Glad to see you looking so well, ma'am," said Allan when the cook, in the majesty of her office, stood proclaimed before him. "Your name is Gripper, is it? I consider you, Mrs. Gripper, the most valuable person in the house. For this reason, that nobody in the house eats a heartier dinner every day than I do. Directions? Oh, no; I've no directions to give. I leave all that to you. Lots of strong soup, and joints done with the gravy in them—there's my notion of good feed-

ing, in two words. Steady! Here's somebody else. Oh, to be sure—the butler! Another valuable person. We'll go right through all the wine in the cellar, Mr. butler; and if I can't give you a sound opinion after that, we'll persevere boldly, and go right through it again. Talking of wine—hullo! here are more of them coming upstairs. There! there! don't trouble yourselves. You've all got capital characters, and you shall all stop here along with me. What was I saying just now? Something about wine; so it was. I'll tell you what, Mr. butler, it isn't every day that a new master comes to Thorpe-Ambrose; and it's my wish that we should all start together on the best possible terms. Let the servants have a grand jollification downstairs, to celebrate my arrival; and give them what they like to drink my health in. It's a poor heart, Mrs. Gripper, that never rejoices, isn't it? No; I won't look at the cellar now: I want to go out and get a breath of fresh air before breakfast. Where's Richard? I say, have I got a garden here? Which side of the house is it! That side, eh? You needn't show me round. I'll go alone, Richard, and lose myself, if I can, in my own property."

With those words Allan descended the terrace-steps in front of the house, whistling cheerfully. He had met the serious responsibility of settling his domestic establishment to his own entire satisfaction. "People talk of the difficulty of managing their servants," thought Allan. "What on earth do they mean? I don't see any difficulty at all." He opened an ornamental gate leading out of the drive at the side of the house; and, following the footman"s directions, entered the shrubbery that sheltered the Thorpe-Ambrose gardens. "Nice shady sort of place for a cigar," said Allan, as he sauntered along, with his hands in his pockets. "I wish I could beat it into my head that it really belongs to *me*."

The shrubbery opened on the broad expanse of a flower-garden, flooded bright in its summer glory by the light of the morning sun.

On one side, an archway, broken through a wall, led into the fruit-garden. On the other, a terrace of turf led to ground on a lower level, laid out as an Italian garden. Wandering past the fountains and statues, Allan reached another shrubbery, winding its way apparently to some remote part of the grounds. Thus far, not a human creature had been visible or audible anywhere; but, as he approached the end of the second shrubbery, it struck him that he heard something on the other side of the foliage. He stopped and listened. There were two voices speaking distinctly—an old

voice that sounded very obstinate, and a young voice that sounded very angry.

"It's no use, Miss," said the old voice. "I mustn't allow it, and I won't allow it. What would Mr. Armadale say?"

"If Mr. Armadale is the gentleman I take him for, you old brute!" replied the young voice, "he would say, 'Come into my garden, Miss Milroy, as often as you like, and take as many nosegays as you please.'"

Allan's bright blue eyes twinkled mischievously. Inspired by a sudden idea, he stole softly to the end of the shrubbery, darted round the corner of it, and, vaulting over a low ring-fence, found himself in a trim little paddock, crossed by a gravel walk. At a short distance down the walk stood a young lady, with her back towards him, trying to force her way past an impenetrable old man, with a rake in his hand, who stood obstinately in front of her, shaking his head.

"Come into my garden, Miss Milroy, as often as you like, and take as many nosegays as you please," cried Allan, remorselessly repeating her own words.

The young lady turned round, with a scream; her muslin dress, which she was holding up in front, dropped from her hand, and a prodigious lapful of flowers rolled out on the gravel walk.

Before another word could be said, the impenetrable old man stepped forward, with the utmost composure, and entered on the question of his own personal interests, as if nothing whatever had happened, and nobody was present but his new master and himself.

"I bid you humbly welcome to Thorpe-Ambrose, sir," said this ancient of the gardens. "My name is Abraham Sage. I've been employed in the grounds for more than forty years; and I hope you'll be pleased to continue me in my place."

So, with vision inexorably limited to the horizon of his own prospects, spoke the gardener—and spoke in vain. Allan was down on his knees on the gravel walk, collecting the fallen flowers, and forming his first impressions of Miss Milroy from the feet upwards.

She was pretty; she was not pretty—she charmed, she disappointed, she charmed again. Tried by recognised line and rule, she was too short and too well-developed for her age. And yet few men's eyes would have wished her figure other than it was. Her hands were so prettily plump and dimpled, that it was hard to see how red they were with the blessed exuberance of youth and health. Her feet apologised gracefully for her old and ill-fitting shoes; and her shoulders made

ample amends for the misdemeanour in muslin which covered them in the shape of a dress. Her dark grey eyes were lovely in their clear softness of colour, in their spirit, tenderness, and sweet good-humour of expression; and her hair (where a shabby old garden hat allowed it to be seen) was of just that lighter shade of brown which gave value by contrast to the darker beauty of her eyes. But these attractions passed, the little attendant blemishes and imperfections of this self-contradictory girl began again. Her nose was too short, her mouth was too large, her face was too round, and too rosy. The dreadful justice of photography would have had no mercy on her; and the sculptors of classical Greece would have bowed her regretfully out of their studios. Admitting all this, and more, the girdle round Miss Milroy's waist was the girdle of Venus, nevertheless—and the pass-key that opens the general heart was the key she carried, if ever a girl possessed it yet. Before Allan had picked up his second handful of flowers, Allan was in love with her.

"Don't! pray don't, Mr. Armadale!" she said, receiving the flowers under protest, as Allan vigorously showered them back into the lap of her dress. "I am so ashamed! I didn't mean to invite myself in that bold way into your garden; my tongue ran away with me—it did indeed! What can I say to excuse myself? Oh, Mr. Armadale, what must you think of me!"

Allan suddenly saw his way to a compliment, and tossed it up to her forthwith, with the third handful of flowers.

"I'll tell you what I think, Miss Milroy," he said, in his blunt, boyish way. "I think the luckiest walk I ever took in my life was the walk this morning that brought me here."

He looked eager and handsome. He was not addressing a woman worn out with admiration, but a girl just beginning a woman's life—and it did him no harm, at any rate, to speak in the character of master of Thorpe-Ambrose. The penitential expression on Miss Milroy's face gently melted away: she looked down, demure and smiling, at the flowers in her lap.

"I deserve a good scolding," she said. "I don't deserve compliments, Mr. Armadale—least of all from *you*."

"Oh, yes, you do!" cried the headlong Allan, getting briskly on his legs. "Besides, it isn't a compliment; it's true. You are the prettiest—— I beg your pardon, Miss Milroy! *my* tongue ran away with me that time."

Among the heavy burdens that are laid on female human nature, perhaps the heaviest, at the age of sixteen, is the

burden of gravity. Miss Milroy struggled—tittered—struggled again—and composed herself for the time being.

The gardener, who still stood where he had stood from the first, immovably waiting for his next opportunity, saw it now, and gently pushed his personal interests into the first gap of silence that had opened within his reach since Allan's appearance on the scene.

"I humbly bid you welcome to Thorpe-Ambrose, sir," said Abraham Sage; beginning obstinately with his little introductory speech for the second time. "My name——"

Before he could deliver himself of his name, Miss Milroy looked accidentally in the horticulturist's pertinacious face—and instantly lost her hold on her gravity beyond recall. Allan, never backward in following a boisterous example of any sort, joined in her laughter with right good-will. The wise man of the gardens showed no surprise, and took no offence. He waited for another gap of silence, and walked in again gently with his personal interests, the moment the two young people stopped to take breath.

"I have been employed in the grounds," proceeded Abraham Sage, irrepressibly, "for more than forty years——"

"You shall be employed in the grounds for forty more, if you'll only hold your tongue and take yourself off!" cried Allan, as soon as he could speak.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said the gardener, with the utmost politeness, but with no present signs either of holding his tongue or of taking himself off.

"Well?" said Allan.

Abraham Sage carefully cleared his throat, and shifted his rake from one hand to the other. He looked down the length of his own invaluable implement, with a grave interest and attention; seeing apparently, not the long handle of a rake, but the long perspective of a vista, with a supplementary personal interest established at the end of it. "When more convenient, sir," resumed this immovable man, "I should wish respectfully to speak to you about my son. Perhaps it may be more convenient in the course of the day? My humble duty, sir, and my best thanks. My son is strictly sober. He is accustomed to the stables, and he belongs to the Church of England—without encumbrances." Having thus planted his offspring provisionally in his master's estimation, Abraham Sage shouldered his invaluable rake, and hobbled slowly out of view.

"If that's a specimen of a trustworthy old servant," said Allan, "I think I'd rather take my chance of being cheated by

a new one. *You* shall not be troubled with him again, Miss Milroy, at any rate. All the flower-beds in the garden are at your disposal—and all the fruit in the fruit season, if you'll only come here and eat it."

"Oh, Mr. Armadale, how very, very kind you are. How can I thank you?"

Allan saw his way to another compliment—an elaborate compliment in the shape of a trap, this time.

"You can do me the greatest possible favour," he said. "You can assist me in forming an agreeable impression of my own grounds."

"Dear me! how?" asked Miss Milroy, innocently.

Allan judiciously closed the trap on the spot in these words: "By taking me with you, Miss Milroy, on your morning walk." He spoke—smiled—and offered his arm.

She saw the way, on her side, to a little flirtation. She rested her hand on his arm—blushed—hesitated—and suddenly took it away again.

"I don't think it's quite right, Mr. Armadale," she said, devoting herself with the deepest attention to her collection of flowers. "Oughtn't we to have some old lady here? Isn't it improper to take your arm until I know you a little better than I do now? I am obliged to ask; I have had so little instruction; I have seen so little of society—and one of papa's friends once said my manners were too bold for my age. What do *you* think?"

"I think it's a very good thing your papa's friend is not here now," answered the outspoken Allan; "I should quarrel with him to a dead certainty. As for society, Miss Milroy, nobody knows less about it than I do; but if we *had* an old lady here, I must say, myself, I think she would be uncommonly in the way. Won't you?" concluded Allan, imploringly offering his arm for the second time. "Do!"

Miss Milroy looked up at him sidelong from her flowers. "You are as bad as the gardener, Mr. Armadale!" She looked down again in a flutter of indecision. "I'm sure it's wrong," she said, and took his arm the instant afterwards, without the slightest hesitation.

They moved away together over the daisied turf of the paddock, young and bright and happy, with the sunlight of the summer morning shining cloudless over their flowery path.

"And where are we going to, now?" asked Allan. "Into another garden?"

She laughed gaily. "How very odd of you, Mr. Armadale, not to know, when it all belongs to you! Are you really see-

ing Thorpe-Ambrose this morning for the first time? How indescribably strange it must feel! No, no; don't say any more complimentary things to me just yet. You may turn my head if you do. We haven't got the old lady with us; and I really must take care of myself. Let me be useful; let me tell you all about your own grounds. We are going out at that little gate, across one of the drives in the park, and then over the rustic bridge, and then round the corner of the plantation—where do you think? To where I live, Mr. Armadale; to the lovely little cottage that you have let to papa. Oh, if you only knew how lucky we thought ourselves to get it!"

She paused, looked up at her companion, and stopped another compliment on the incorrigible Allan's lips.

"I'll drop your arm," she said coquettishly, "if you do! We *were* lucky to get the cottage, Mr. Armadale. Papa said he felt under an obligation to you for letting it, the day we got in. And *I* said I felt under an obligation, no longer ago than last week."

"You, Miss Milroy!" exclaimed Allan.

"Yes. It may surprise you to hear it; but if you hadn't let the cottage to papa, I believe I should have suffered the indignity and misery of being sent to school."

Allan's memory reverted to the half-crown that he had spun on the cabin-table of the yacht, at Castletown. "If she only knew that I had tossed up for it!" he thought, guiltily.

"I daresay you don't understand why I should feel such a horror of going to school," pursued Miss Milroy, misinterpreting the momentary silence on her companion's side. "If I had gone to school in early life—I mean at the age when other girls go—I shouldn't have minded it now. But I had no such chance at the time. It was the time of mamma's illness and of papa's unfortunate speculations; and as papa had nobody to comfort him but me, of course I stayed at home. You needn't laugh; I was of some use, I can tell you. I helped papa over his trouble, by sitting on his knee after dinner, and asking him to tell me stories of all the remarkable people he had known when he was about in the great world, at home and abroad. Without me to amuse him in the evening, and his clock to occupy him in the daytime——"

"His clock?" repeated Allan.

"Oh, yes! I ought to have told you. Papa is an extraordinary mechanical genius. You will say so, too, when you see his clock. It's nothing like so large, of course, but it's on the model of the famous clock at Strasbourg. Only think, he began it when I was eight years old; and (though I was six-

teen last birthday) it isn't finished yet! Some of our friends were quite surprised he should take to such a thing when his troubles began. But papa himself set that right in no time; he reminded them that Louis the Sixteenth took to lock-making when *his* troubles began—and then everybody was perfectly satisfied." She stopped, and changed colour confusedly. "Oh, Mr. Armadale," she said in genuine embarrassment this time, "here is my unlucky tongue running away with me again!"

"No, no; do go on!" pleaded Allan. "It's a fault of mine to be familiar, too. Besides, we *must* be familiar; we are such near neighbours."

She smiled and hesitated. "I don't exactly remember where I was," she replied, "I only remember I had something I wanted to tell you. This comes, Mr. Armadale, of my taking your arm. I should get on so much better, if you would only consent to walk separately. You won't? Well, then, will you tell me what it was I wanted to say? Where was I before I went wandering off to papa's troubles and papa's clock?"

"At school!" replied Allan, with a prodigious effort of memory.

"*Not* at school, you mean," said Miss Milroy; "and all through *you*. Now I can go on again, which is a great comfort. I am quite serious, Mr. Armadale, in saying that I should have been sent to school, if you had said No when papa proposed for the cottage. This is how it happened. When we began moving in, Mrs. Blanchard sent us a most kind message from the great house to say that her servants were at our disposal, if we wanted any assistance. The least papa and I could do after that was to call and thank her. We saw Mrs. Blanchard and Miss Blanchard. Mrs. was charming, and Miss looked perfectly lovely in her mourning. I'm sure you admire her? She's tall and pale and graceful—quite your idea of beauty, I should think?"

"Nothing like it," began Allan. "My idea of beauty at the present moment——"

Miss Milroy felt it coming, and instantly took her hand off his arm.

"I mean I have never seen either Mrs. Blanchard or her niece," added Allan, precipitately correcting himself.

Miss Milroy tempered justice with mercy, and put her hand back again.

"How extraordinary that you should never have seen them!" she went on. "Why, you are a perfect stranger to

everything and everybody at Thorpe-Ambrose! Well, after Miss Blanchard and I had sat and talked a little while, I heard my name on Mrs. Blanchard's lips, and instantly held my breath. She was asking papa if I had finished my education. Out came papa's great grievance directly. My old governess, you must know, left us to be married just before we came here, and none of our friends could produce a new one whose terms were reasonable. 'I'm told, Mrs. Blanchard, by people who understand it better than I do,' says papa, 'that advertising is a risk. It all falls on me, in Mrs. Milroy's state of health, and I suppose I must end in sending my little girl to school. Do you happen to know of a school within the means of a poor man?' Mrs. Blanchard shook her head—I could have kissed her on the spot for doing it. 'All my experience, Major Milroy,' says this perfect angel of a woman, 'is in favour of advertising. My niece's governess was originally obtained by an advertisement, and you may imagine her value to us when I tell you she lived in our family for more than ten years.' I could have gone down on both my knees and worshipped Mrs. Blanchard then and there—and I only wonder I didn't! Papa was struck at the time—I could see that—and he referred to it again on the way home. 'Though I have been long out of the world, my dear,' says papa, 'I know a highly-bred woman and a sensible woman when I see her. Mrs. Blanchard's experience puts advertising in a new light—I must think about it.' He *has* thought about it, and (though he hasn't openly confessed it to me) I know that he decided to advertise, no later than last night. So, if papa thanks you for letting the cottage, Mr. Armadale, I thank you, too. But for you, we should never have known darling Mrs. Blanchard; and but for darling Mrs. Blanchard, I should have been sent to school."

Before Allan could reply, they turned the corner of the plantation, and came in sight of the cottage. Description of it is needless; the civilised universe knows it already. It was the typical cottage of the drawing-master's early lessons in neat shading and the broad pencil touch—with the trim thatch, the luxuriant creepers, the modest lattice-windows, the rustic porch, and the wicker bird-cage, all complete.

"Isn't it lovely?" said Miss Milroy. "Do come in!"

"May I?" asked Allan. "Won't the major think it too early?"

"Early or late, I am sure papa will be only too glad to see you."

She led the way briskly up the garden path, and opened the parlour door. As Allan followed her into the little room, he saw, at the further end of it, a gentleman sitting alone at an old-fashioned writing-table, with his back turned to his visitor.

"Papa! a surprise for you!" said Miss Milroy, rousing him from his occupation; "Mr. Armadale has come to Thorpe-Ambrose; and I have brought him here to see you."

The major started; rose, bewildered for the moment; recovered himself immediately, and advanced to welcome his young landlord, with hospitable outstretched hand.

"I am heartily glad to see you, Mr. Armadale," he said, speaking in the changeless, quiet, subdued tone peculiar to most men whose occupations are of the solitary and monotonous kind. "You have done me one favour already, by taking me as your tenant; and you now do me another by paying this friendly visit. If you have not breakfasted already, let me waive all ceremony on my side, and ask you to take your place at our little table."

"With the greatest pleasure, Major Milroy, if I am not in the way," replied Allan, delighted at his reception. "I was sorry to hear from Miss Milroy that Mrs. Milroy is an invalid. Perhaps, my being here unexpectedly; perhaps the sight of a strange face——"

"I understand your hesitation, Mr. Armadale," said the major; "but it is quite unnecessary. Mrs. Milroy's illness keeps her entirely confined to her own room. Have we got everything we want on the table, my love?" he went on, changing the subject so abruptly, that a closer observer than Allan might have suspected it was distasteful to him. "Will you come and make tea?"

Miss Milroy's attention appeared to be already pre-engaged: she made no reply. While her father and Allan had been exchanging civilities, she had been putting the writing-table in order, and examining the various objects scattered on it with the unrestrained curiosity of a spoilt child. The moment after the major had spoken to her, she discovered a morsel of paper hidden between the leaves of the blotting-book, snatched it up, looked at it, and turned round instantly, with an exclamation of surprise.

"Do my eyes deceive me, papa?" she asked. "Or were you really and truly writing *the* advertisement when I came in?"

"I had just finished it," replied her father. "But, my dear, Mr. Armadale is here—we are waiting for breakfast."

"Mr. Armadale knows all about it," rejoined Miss Milroy. "I told him in the garden."

"Oh, yes!" said Allan. "Pray, don't make a stranger of me, major! If it's about the governess, I've got something (in an indirect sort of way) to do with it, too."

Major Milroy smiled. Before he could answer, his daughter, who had been reading the advertisement, appealed to him eagerly for the second time.

"Oh, papa," she said, "there's one thing here I don't like at all! Why do you put grandmamma's initials at the end? Why do you tell them to write to grandmamma's house in London?"

"My dear! your mother can do nothing in this matter, as you know. And as for me (even if I went to London), questioning strange ladies about their characters and accomplishments is the last thing in the world that I am fit to do. Your grandmamma is on the spot; and your grandmamma is the proper person to receive the letters, and to make all the necessary inquiries."

"But I want to see the letters myself," persisted the spoilt child. "Some of them are sure to be amusing——"

"I don't apologise for this very unceremonious reception of you, Mr. Armadale," said the major, turning to Allan, with a quaint and quiet humour. It may be useful as a warning, if you ever chance to marry and have a daughter—not to begin, as I have done, by letting her have her own way."

Allan laughed, and Miss Milroy persisted.

"Besides," she went on, I should like to help in choosing which letters we answer, and which we don't. I think I ought to have some voice in the selection of my own governess. Why not tell them, papa, to send their letters down here—to the post office or the stationer's, or anywhere you like? When you and I have read them, we can send up the letters we prefer to grandmamma; and she can ask all the questions, and pick out the best governess, just as you have arranged already, without leaving ME entirely in the dark, which I consider (don't you, Mr. Armadale?) to be quite inhuman. Let me alter the address, papa—do, there's a darling!"

"We shall get no breakfast, Mr. Armadale, if I don't say Yes," said the major, good-humouredly. "Do as you like, my dear," he added, turning to his daughter. "As long as it ends in your grandmamma's managing the matter for us, the rest is of very little consequence."

Miss Milroy took up her father's pen, drew it through the

last line of the advertisement, and wrote the altered address with her own hand as follows:

"*Apply, by letter, to M., Post-office, Thorpe-Ambrose, Norfolk.*"

"There!" she said, bustling to her place at the breakfast-table. "The advertisement may go to London now; and if a governess *does* come of it, oh, papa, who, in the name of wonder, will she be?—Tea or coffee, Mr. Armadale? I'm really ashamed of having kept you waiting. But it is such a comfort," she added, saucily, "to get all one's business off one's mind before breakfast!"

Father, daughter, and guest sat down together sociably at the little round table—the best of good neighbours and good friends already.

Three days later one of the London newsboys got *his* business off his mind before breakfast. His district was Diana Street, Pimlico; and the last of the morning's newspapers which he disposed of, was the newspaper he left at Mrs. Oldershaw's door.

CHAPTER III

MISS GWILT'S DIARY

July 3rd—I have succeeded in my object. I am Miss Milroy's governess! Armadale's friend Midwinter has been appointed steward of the estate, and Armadale has even gone to the trouble of raking up an old man, Bashwood, to teach Midwinter his job! This Bashwood—he once worked for Pedgift and Son, the village solicitors—has taken quite a fancy to me, in spite of the fact that he is sixty, if a day.

Miss Milroy and Armadale think they love one another already—as if that young minx, Milroy, could steal him from me now!

Midwinter affects me strangely. I think he has fallen in love with me also—and I am half-afraid that I have fallen in love with him—but my days for love are over.

When I first came here everyone had left the cottage to go on a picnic got up by Armadale. I followed them to the Norfolk Broads in the carriage left for me, and was waiting by one of the pools, my back against the light, when Midwinter came up. I heard him say: "The Vision—the Vision of the Dream!" I do not yet know what he meant.

VOLUME II

CHAPTER I

THE CLOUDING OF THE SKY

Nine days had passed, and the tenth day was nearly at an end, since Miss Gwilt and her pupil had taken their morning walk in the cottage garden.

The night was overcast. Since sunset, there had been signs in the sky from which the popular forecast had predicted rain. The reception-rooms at the great house were all empty and dark. Allan was away, passing the evening with the Milroys; and Midwinter was waiting his return—not where Midwinter usually waited, among the books in the library—but in the little back room which Allan's mother had inhabited in the last days of her residence at Thorpe-Ambrose.

Nothing had been taken away, but much had been added to the room, since Midwinter had first seen it. The books which Mrs. Armadale had left behind her, the furniture, the old matting on the floor, the old paper on the walls, were all undisturbed. The statuette of Niobe still stood on its bracket, and the French window still opened on the garden. But, now, to the relics left by the mother, were added the personal possessions belonging to the son. The wall, bare hitherto, was decorated with water-colour drawings—with a portrait of Mrs. Armadale, supported on one side by a view of the old house in Somersetshire, and on the other by a picture of the yacht. Among the books which bore in faded ink Mrs. Armadale's inscriptions, "From my father", were other books inscribed in the same handwriting, in brighter ink, "To my son".

The hour wore on quietly as Allan's friend sat waiting for Allan's return. Sometimes reading, sometimes thinking placidly, he wiled away the time. No vexing cares, no boding doubts troubled him now. The rent-day, which he had once dreaded, had come and gone harmlessly. A friendlier understanding had been established between Allan and his tenants; Mr. Bashwood had proved himself to be worthy of the confidence reposed in him; the Pedgifts, father and son, had amply justified their client's good opinion of them. Wherever

Midwinter looked, the prospect was bright, the future was without a cloud.

He trimmed the lamp on the table beside him, and looked out at the night. The stable-clock was chiming the half-hour past eleven as he walked to the window, and the first raindrops were beginning to fall. He had his hand on the bell, to summon the servant, and send him over to the cottage with an umbrella, when he was stopped by hearing the familiar footstep on the walk outside.

"How late you are!" said Midwinter, as Allan entered through the open French window. "Was there a party at the cottage?"

"No! only ourselves. The time slipped away somehow."

He answered in lower tones than usual, and sighed as he took his chair.

"You seem to be out of spirits?" pursued Midwinter. "What's the matter?"

Allan hesitated. "I may as well tell you," he said, after a moment. "It's nothing to be ashamed of; I only wonder you haven't noticed it before! There's a woman in it as usual—I'm in love."

Midwinter laughed. "Has Miss Milroy been more charming to-night than ever?" he asked, gaily.

"Miss Milroy!" repeated Allan. "What are you thinking of! I'm not in love with Miss Milroy."

"Who is it, then?"

"Who is it? What a question to ask! Who *can* it be but Miss Gwilt?"

There was a sudden silence. Allan sat listlessly, with his hands in his pockets, looking out through the open window at the falling rain. If he had turned towards his friend when he mentioned Miss Gwilt's name, he might possibly have been a little startled by the change he would have seen in Midwinter's face.

"I suppose you don't approve of it?" he said, after waiting a little.

There was no answer.

"It's too late to make objections," proceeded Allan. "I really mean it when I tell you I'm in love with her."

"A fortnight since you were in love with Miss Milroy," said the other in quiet, measured tones.

"Pooh! a mere flirtation. It's different this time. I'm in earnest about Miss Gwilt."

He looked round as he spoke. Midwinter turned his face aside on the instant, and bent it over a book.

"Do you think seven or eight and twenty is too old for me? If you were in love with a woman yourself, you wouldn't think seven or eight and twenty too old—would you?"

"I can't say I should think it too old, if——"

"If you were really fond of her?"

Once more there was no answer.

"Well," resumed Allan, "if there's no harm in her being only a governess, and no harm in her being a little older than I am, what's the objection to Miss Gwilt?"

Midwinter suddenly started to his feet, and opened the door.

"We'll talk of this to-morrow," he said. "Good night."

Allan looked round in astonishment. The door was closed again, and he was alone in the room.

"He has never shaken hands with me!" exclaimed Allan, looking bewildered at the empty chair.

As the words passed his lips the door opened, and Midwinter appeared again.

"We haven't shaken hands," he said, abruptly. "God bless you, Allan! We'll talk of it to-morrow. Good-night."

Allan stood alone at the window, looking out at the pouring rain. He felt ill at ease, without knowing why. "Midwinter's ways get stranger and stranger," he thought. "What can he mean by putting me off till to-morrow, when I wanted to speak to him to-night?" He took up his bedroom candle a little impatiently—put it down again—and, walking back to the open window, stood looking out in the direction of the cottage. "I wonder if she's thinking of me?" he said to himself softly.

She *was* thinking of him. She had just opened her desk to write to Mrs. Oldershaw; and her pen had that moment traced the opening line:—"Make your mind easy. I have got him!"

CHAPTER II

EXIT

It rained all through the night; and when the morning came, it was raining still.

Contrary to his ordinary habit, Midwinter was waiting in the breakfast-room when Allan entered it. He looked worn and weary, but his smile was gentler, and his manner more

composed than usual. To Allan's surprise he approached the subject of the previous night's conversation of his own accord as soon as the servant was out of the room.

"I am afraid you thought me very impatient and very abrupt with you last night," he said. "I will try to make amends for it this morning. I will hear everything you wish to say to me on the subject of Miss Gwilt."

"I hardly like to worry you," said Allan. "You look as if you had had a bad night's rest."

"I have not slept well for some time past," replied Midwinter quietly. "Something has been wrong with me. But I believe I have found out the way to put myself right again without troubling the doctors. Later in the morning I shall have something to say to you about this. Let us get back first to what you were talking of last night. You were speaking of some difficulty—" He hesitated, and finished the sentence in a tone so low that Allan failed to hear him. "Perhaps it would be better," he went on, "if, instead of speaking to me, you spoke to Mr. Brock?"

"I would rather speak to *you*," said Allan. "But tell me first, was I right or wrong last night in thinking you disapproved of my falling in love with Miss Gwilt?"

"You love her," Midwinter said. "Does *she* love *you*?"

"You won't think me vain?" returned Allan. "I told you yesterday I had had private opportunities with her——"

Midwinter's eyes dropped again to the crumbs on his plate. "I understand," he interposed quickly. "You were wrong last night. I had no objections to make."

"Don't you congratulate me?" asked Allan, a little uneasily. "Such a beautiful woman! such a clever woman!"

Midwinter held out his hand. "I owe you more than mere congratulations," he said. "In anything which is for your happiness I owe you help." He took Allan's hand, and wrung it hard. "Can I help you?" he asked, growing paler and paler as he spoke.

"My dear fellow?" exclaimed Allan, "what *is* the matter with you? Your hand is as cold as ice."

Midwinter smiled faintly. "I am always in extremes," he said; "my hand was as hot as fire the first time you took it at the old west-country inn. Come to that difficulty which you have not come to yet. You are young, rich, your own master—and she loves you. What difficulty can there be?"

Allan hesitated. "I hardly know how to put it," he replied. "As you said just now, I love her, and she loves me—

and yet there is a sort of strangeness between us. One talks a good deal about one's self, when one is in love—at least I do. I've told her all about myself and my mother, and how I came in for this place, and the rest of it. Well—though it doesn't strike me when we are together—it comes across me now and then, when I'm away from her, that she doesn't say much on her side. In fact, I know no more about her than you do."

"Do you mean that you know nothing about Miss Gwilt's family and friends?"

"That's it, exacly."

"Have you never asked her about them?"

"I said something of the sort the other day," returned Allan; "and I'm afraid, as usual, I said it in the wrong way. She looked—I can't quite tell you how; not exactly displeased, but—oh, what things words are! I'd give the world, Midwinter, if I could only find the right word when I want it, as well as you do."

"Did Miss Gwilt say anything to you in the way of a reply?"

"That's just what I was coming to. She said, 'I shall have a melancholy story to tell you one of these days, Mr. Armadale, about myself and my family; but you look so happy and the circumstances are so distressing, that I have hardly the heart to speak of it now.' Ah, *she* can express herself—with the tears in her eyes, my dear fellow, with the tears in her eyes! Of course I changed the subject directly. And now the difficulty is how to get back to it, delicately, without making her cry again. We *must* get back to it, you know. Not on my account; I am quite content to marry her first and hear of her family misfortunes, poor thing, afterwards. But I know Mr. Brock. If I can't satisfy him about her family when I write to tell him of this (which of course I must do), he will be dead against the whole thing. I'm my own master of course, and I can do as I like about it. But dear old Brock was such a good friend to my poor mother, and he has been such a good friend to me—you see what I mean, don't you?"

"Certainly, Allan; Mr. Brock has been your second father. Any disagreement between you about such a serious matter as this, would be the saddest thing that could happen. You ought to satisfy him that Miss Gwilt is (what I am sure Miss Gwilt will prove to be) worthy, in every way worthy—" His voice sank in spite of him, and he left the sentence unfinished.

"Just my feeling in the matter!" Allan struck in glibly.

"Now we can come to what I particularly wanted to consult you about. If this was your case, Midwinter, you would be able to say the right words to her—you would put it delicately, even though you were putting it quite in the dark. I can't do that. I'm a blundering sort of fellow; and I'm horribly afraid, if I can't get some hint at the truth to help me at starting, of saying something to distress her. Family misfortunes are such tender subjects to touch on—especially with such a refined woman, such a tender-hearted woman, as Miss Gwilt. There may have been some dreadful death in the family—some relation who has disgraced himself—some infernal cruelty which has forced the poor thing out on the world as a governess. Well, turning it over in my mind, it struck me that the major might be able to put me on the right track. It is quite possible that he might have been informed of Miss Gwilt's family circumstances before he engaged her—isn't it?"

"It is possible, Allan, certainly."

"Just my feeling again! My notion is, to speak to the major. If I could only get the story from him first, I should know so much better how to speak to Miss Gwilt about it afterwards. You advise me to try the major, don't you?"

There was a pause before Midwinter replied. When he did answer it was a little reluctantly.

"I hardly know how to advise you, Allan," he said. "This is a very delicate matter."

"I believe you would try the major if you were in my place," returned Allan, reverting to his inveterately personal way of putting the question.

"Perhaps I might," said Midwinter, more and more unwillingly. "But if I did speak to the major, I should be very careful, in your place, not to put myself in a false position; I should be very careful to let no one suspect me of the meanness of prying into a woman's secrets behind her back."

Allan's face flushed. "Good heavens, Midwinter," he exclaimed, "who could suspect me of that?"

"Nobody, Allan, who really knows you."

"The major knows me. The major is the last man in the world to misunderstand me. All I want him to do, is to help me (if he can) to speak about a delicate subject to Miss Gwilt, without hurting her feelings. Can anything be simpler between two gentlemen?'

Instead of replying, Midwinter, still speaking as con-

strainedly as ever, asked a question on his side. "Do you mean to tell Major Milroy," he said, "what your intentions really are towards Miss Gwilt?"

Allan's manner altered. He hesitated and looked confused.

"I have been thinking of that," he replied; "and I mean to feel my way first, and then tell him or not afterwards, as matters turn out."

A proceeding so cautious as this, was too strikingly inconsistent with Allan's character not to surprise any one who knew him. Midwinter showed his surprise plainly.

"You forget that foolish flirtation of mine with Miss Milroy," Allan went on, more confusedly. "The major may have noticed it, and may have thought I meant—well, what I didn't mean. It might be rather awkward, mightn't it, to propose to his face for his governess instead of his daughter?"

He waited for a word of answer, but none came. Midwinter opened his lips to speak, and suddenly checked himself. Allan, uneasy at his silence, doubly uneasy under certain recollections of the major's daughter which the conversation had called up, rose from the table, and shortened the interview a little impatiently.

"Come! come!" he said, "don't sit there looking unutterable things; don't make mountains out of mole-hills. You have such an old, old head, Midwinter, on those young shoulders of yours? Let's have done with all these pros and cons. Do you mean to tell me in plain words, that it won't do to speak to the major?"

"I can't take the responsibility, Allan, of telling you that. To be plainer still, I can't feel confident of the soundness of any advice I may give you in—in our present position towards each other. All I am sure of is, that I cannot possibly be wrong in entreating you to do two things."

"What are they?'

"If you speak to Major Milroy, pray remember the caution I have given you! Pray think of what you say before you say it!"

"I'll think—never fear! What next?"

"Before you take any serious step in this matter, write and tell Mr. Brock. Will you promise me to do that?"

"With all my heart. Anything more?"

"Nothing more. I have said my last words."

Allan led the way to the door. "Come into my room," he said, "and I'll give you a cigar. The servants will be in

here directly, to clear away; and I want to go on talking about Miss Gwilt."

"Don't wait for me," said Midwinter; "I'll follow you in a minute or two."

He remained seated until Allan had closed the door—then rose, and took from a corner of the room, where it lay hidden behind one of the curtains, a knapsack ready packed for travelling. As he stood at the window thinking, with the knapsack in his hand, a strangely old, careworn look stole over his face: he seemed to lose the last of his youth in an instant.

What the woman's quicker insight had discovered days since, the man's slower perception had only realised in the past night. The pang which had wrung him when he heard Allan's avowal, had set the truth self-revealed before Midwinter for the first time. He had been conscious of looking at Miss Gwilt with new eyes and a new mind, but he had never until now known the passion that she had roused in him for what it really was. Knowing it at last, feeling it consciously in full possession of him, he had the courage which no man with a happier experience of life would have possessed—the courage to recall what Allan had confided to him, and to look resolutely at the future through his own grateful remembrances of the past.

. . . . . .

The rain was still falling. The sullen sky, all round the horizon, still lowered watery and dark, when Midwinter, equipped for travelling, appeared in Allan's room.

"Good heavens!" cried Allan, pointing to the knapsack, "what does *that* mean?"

"Nothing very extraordinary," said Midwinter. "It only means—good-bye."

"Good-bye!" repeated Allan, starting to his feet in astonishment.

Midwinter put him back gently into his chair, and drew a seat near to it for himself.

"When you noticed that I looked ill this morning," he said, "I told you that I had been thinking of a way to recover my health, and that I meant to speak to you about it later in the day. That later time has come. I have been out of sorts, as the phrase is, for some time past. You have remarked it yourself, Allan, more than once; and, with your usual kindness, you have allowed it to excuse many things in my con-

duct which would have been otherwise unpardonable, even in your friendly eyes."

"My dear fellow," interposed Allan, "you don't mean to say you are going out on a walking tour in this pouring rain!"

"Never mind the rain," rejoined Midwinter. "The rain and I are old friends. You know something, Allan, of the life I led before you met with me. From the time when I was a child, I have been used to hardship and exposure. Night and day, sometimes for months together, I never had my head under a roof. For years and years, the life of a wild animal—perhaps I ought to say, the life of a savage—was the life I led, while you were at home and happy. I have the leaven of the vagabond—the vagabond animal, or the vagabond man, I hardly know which—in me still. Give me a week or two away, Allan—up northward, on foot, to the Yorkshire moors—and I promise to return to Thorpe-Ambrose, better company for you and for your friends. I shall be back before you have time to miss me. Mr. Bashwood will take care of the business in the office; it is only for a fortnight, and it is for my own good—let me go!"

"I don't like it," said Allan. "I don't like your leaving me in this sudden manner. There's something so strange and dreary about it. Why not try riding, if you want more exercise; all the horses in the stables are at your disposal. At all events, you can't possibly go to-day. Look at the rain!"

Midwinter looked towards the window, and gently shook his head.

"I thought nothing of the rain," he said, "when I was a mere child, getting my living with the dancing dogs—why should I think anything of it now? *My* getting wet, and *your* getting wet, Allan, are two very different things. When I was a fisherman's boy in the Hebrides, I hadn't a dry thread on me for weeks together."

"But you're not in the Hebrides now," persisted Allan; "and I expect our friends from the cottage to-morrow evening. You can't start till after to-morrow. Miss Gwilt is going to give us some more music, and you know you like Miss Gwilt's playing."

Midwinter turned aside to buckle the straps of his knapsack. "Give me another chance of hearing Miss Gwilt when I come back," he said, with his head down, and his fingers busy at the straps.

"You have one fault, my dear fellow, and it grows on you," remonstrated Allan; "when you have once taken a thing into

your head, you're the most obstinate man alive. There's no persuading you to listen to reason. If you *will* go," added Allan, suddenly rising as Midwinter took up his hat and stick in silence, "I have half a mind to go with you, and try a little roughing it too!"

"Go with *me*!" repeated Midwinter, with a momentary bitterness in his tone, "and leave Miss Gwilt!"

Allan sat down again, and admitted the force of the objection in significant silence. Without a word more on his side, Midwinter held out his hand to take leave. They were both deeply moved, and each was anxious to hide his agitation from the other.

"You'll come back?" Allan said.

Midwinter opened the French window, and stepped out into the garden.

"Yes," he said, answering with all his former gentleness of manner, "I'll come back in a fortnight. Good-by, Allan; and good luck with Miss Gwilt!"

He pushed the window to, and was away across the garden before his friend could open it again and follow him.

THE END OF THE SECOND BOOK

BOOK THE THIRD

CHAPTER I

MRS. MILROY

Two days after Midwinter's departure from Thorpe-Ambrose, Mrs. Milroy having completed her morning toilette, and having dismissed her nurse, rang the bell again five minutes afterwards, and on the woman's reappearance, asked impatiently, if the post had come in.

"Post?" echoed the nurse. "Haven't you got your watch? Don't you know that it's a good half-hour too soon to ask for your letters?" She spoke with the confident insolence of a servant long accustomed to presume on her mistress's weakness, and her mistress's necessities. Mrs. Milroy, on her side, appeared to be well used to her nurse's manner; she gave her orders composedly, without noticing it.

"When the postman does come," she said, "see him yourself. I am expecting a letter which I ought to have had two days since. I don't understand it. I'm beginning to suspect the servants."

The nurse smiled contemptuously. "Who will you suspect next?" she asked. "There! don't put yourself out. I'll answer the gate-bell this morning; and we'll see if I can't bring you a letter when the postman comes." Saying those words, with the tone and manner of a woman who is quieting a fractious child, the nurse, without waiting to be dismissed, left the room.

Mrs. Milroy turned slowly and wearily on her bed, when she was left by herself again, and let the light from the window fall on her face.

On the marriage of the governess who had lived in his service for many years (a woman of an age and an appearance to set even Mrs. Milroy's jealousy at defiance), the major had considered the question of sending his daughter away from home, far more seriously than his wife supposed. He was conscious that scenes took place in the house at which no young girl should be present; but he felt an invincible reluctance to apply the one efficient remedy—the keeping his daughter away from home in school-time and holiday-time alike. The struggle thus raised in his mind once set at rest,

by the resolution to advertise for a new governess, Major Milroy's natural tendency to avoid trouble rather than to meet it, had declared itself in its customary manner. He had closed his eyes again on his home anxieties as quietly as usual, and had gone back, as he had gone back on hundreds of previous occasions, to the consoling society of his old friend the clock.

It was far otherwise with the major's wife. The chance which her husband had entirely overlooked, that the new governess who was to come might be a younger and a more attractive woman than the old governess who had gone, was the first chance that presented itself as possible to Mrs. Milroy's mind. She had said nothing. Secretly waiting, and secretly nursing her inveterate distrust, she had encouraged her husband and her daughter to leave her on the occasion of the picnic, with the express purpose of making an opportunity for seeing the new governess alone. The governess had shown herself; and the smouldering fire of Mrs. Milroy's jealousy had burst into flame, in the moment when she and the handsome stranger first set eyes on each other.

The assistance of the nurse, in the capacity of spy, was secured—as Mrs. Milroy had been accustomed to secure other extra services which her attendant was not bound to render her—by a present of a dress from the mistress's wardrobe. One after another, articles of wearing apparel which were now useless to Mrs. Milroy, had ministered in this way to feed the nurse's greed— the insatiable greed of an ugly woman for fine clothes. Bribed with the smartest dress she had secured yet, the household spy took her secret orders, and applied herself with a vile enjoyment of it to her secret work.

The days passed, the work went on—but nothing had come of it. Mistress and servant had a woman to deal with who was a match for both of them.

Repeated intrusions on the major, when the governess happened to be in the same room with him, failed to discover the slightest impropriety of word, look, or action, on either side. Stealthy watching and listening at the governess's bedroom door, detected that she kept a light in her room at late hours of the night, and that she groaned and ground her teeth in her sleep—and detected nothing more. Careful superintendence in the day-time, proved that she regularly posted her own letters, instead of giving them to the servant; and that on certain occasions when the occupation of her hours out of lesson-time and walking-time was left at her own disposal, she had been suddenly missed from the garden, and then caught coming back alone to it from the park. Once

and once only, the nurse had found an opportunity of following her out of the garden—had been detected immediately in the park—and had been asked with the most exasperating politeness, if she wished to join Miss Gwilt in a walk.

Foiled in this direction, Mrs. Milroy tried next to find an assailable place in the statement which the governess's reference had made on the subject of the governess's character.

Obtaining from the major the minutely careful report which his mother had addressed to him on this topic, Mrs. Milroy read and re-read it, and failed to find the weak point of which she was in search in any part of the letter. All the customary questions on such occasions had been asked, and all had been scrupulously and plainly answered. The one sole opening for an attack which it was possible to discover, was an opening which showed itself, after more practical matters had been all disposed of, in the closing sentences of the letter.

"I was so struck" (the passage ran) "by the grace and distinction of Miss Gwilt's manners, that I took an opportunity, when she was out of the room, of asking how she first came to be governess. 'In the usual way,' I was told. 'A sad family misfortune, in which she behaved nobly. She is a very sensitive person, and shrinks from speaking of it among strangers—a natural reluctance which I have always felt it a matter of delicacy to respect.' Hearing this, of course I felt the same delicacy on my side. It was no part of my duty to intrude on the poor thing's private sorrows; my only business was to do, what I have now done, to make sure that I was engaging a capable and respectable governess to instruct my grandchild."

After careful consideration of these lines, Mrs. Milroy having a strong desire to find the circumstances suspicious, found them suspicious accordingly. She determined to sift the mystery of Miss Gwilt's family misfortunes to the bottom, on the chance of extracting from it something useful to her purpose. There were two ways of doing this. She might begin by questioning the governess herself, or she might begin by questioning the governess's reference. Experience of Miss Gwilt's quickness of resource in dealing with awkward questions at their introductory interview, decided her on taking the latter course. "I'll get the particulars from the reference first," thought Mrs. Milroy, "and then question the creature herself, and see if the two stories agree."

The letter of inquiry was short and scrupulously to the point.

Mrs. Milroy began by informing her correspondent that

the state of her health necessitated leaving her daughter entirely under the governess's influence and control. On that account she was more anxious than most mothers to be thoroughly informed in every respect about the person to whom she confided the entire charge of an only child; and, feeling this anxiety, she might perhaps be excused for putting what might be thought, after the excellent character Miss Gwilt had received, a somewhat unnecessary question. With that preface, Mrs. Milroy came to the point, and requested to be informed of the circumstances which had obliged Miss Gwilt to go out as a governess.

Mrs. Milroy had just looked at her watch, and had just put her hand once more to the bell-pull, when the door opened and the nurse entered the room.

"Has the postman come?" asked Mrs. Milroy.

The nurse laid a letter on the bed without answering, and waited, with unconcealed curiosity, to watch the effect which it produced on her mistress.

Mrs. Milroy tore open the envelope the instant it was in her hand. A printed paper appeared (which she threw aside), surrounding a letter (which she looked at) in her own handwriting! She snatched up the printed paper. It was the customary Post Office circular, informing her that her letter had been duly presented at the right address, and that the person whom she had written to was not to be found.

"Something wrong?" asked the nurse, detecting a change in her mistress's face.

The question passed unheeded. Mrs. Milroy's writing-desk was on the table at the bedside. She took from it the letter which the major's mother had written to her son, and turned to the page containing the name and address of Miss Gwilt's reference. "Mrs. Mandeville, 18 Kingsdown Crescent, Bayswater," she read eagerly to herself, and then looked at the address on her own returned letter. No error had been committed; the directions were identically the same.

"Something wrong?" reiterated the nurse, advancing a step nearer to the bed.

"Thank God—yes!" cried Mrs. Milroy, with a sudden outburst of exultation. She tossed the Post Office circular to the nurse, and beat her bony hands on the bed-clothes, in an ecstasy of anticipated triumph. "Miss Gwilt's an impostor! Miss Gwilt's an impostor! If I die for it, Rachel, I'll be carried to the window to see the police carry her away!"

"It's one thing to say she's an impostor behind her back,

and another thing to prove it to her face," remarked the nurse. She put her hand as she spoke into her apron pocket, and, with a significant look at her mistress, silently produced a second letter.

"For me?" asked Mrs. Milroy.

"No," said the nurse, "for Miss Gwilt."

The two women eyed each other, and understood each other without another word.

"Where is she?" asked Mrs. Milroy.

The nurse pointed in the direction of the park. "Out again, for another walk before breakfast—by herself."

Mrs. Milroy beckoned to the nurse to stoop close over her. "Can you open it, Rachel?" she whispered.

Rachel nodded.

"Can you close it again, so that nobody would know?"

"Can you spare the scarf that matches your pearl-grey dress?" asked Rachel.

"Take it!" said Mrs. Milroy, impatiently.

The nurse opened the wardrobe in silence; took the scarf in silence; and left the room in silence. In less than five minutes she came back with the envelope of Miss Gwilt's letter open in her hand.

"Thank you, ma'am, for the scarf," said Rachel, putting the opened letter composedly on the counterpane of the bed.

Mrs. Milroy looked at the envelope. It had been closed as usual by means of adhesive gum, which had been made to give way by the application of steam. As Mrs. Milroy took out the letter, her hand trembled violently, and the white enamel parted into cracks over the wrinkles on her forehead.

Rachel withdrew to the window to keep watch on the park. "Don't hurry," she said. "No signs of her yet."

Mrs. Milroy still paused, keeping the all-important morsel of paper folded in her hand. She could have taken Miss Gwilt's life—but she hesitated at reading Miss Gwilt's letter.

"Are you troubled with scruples?" asked the nurse, with a sneer. "Consider it a duty you owe to your daughter."

"You wretch!" said Mrs. Milroy. With that expression of opinion, she opened the letter.

It was evidently written in great haste—was undated—and was signed in initials only. Thus it ran:—

"Diana Street.

"MY DEAR LYDIA—The cab is waiting at the door, and I have only a moment to tell you that I am obliged to leave

London, on business, for three or four days, or a week at longest. My letters will be forwarded if you write. I got yours yesterday, and I agree with you that it is very important to put him off the awkward subject of yourself and your family as long as you safely can. The better you know him, the better you will be able to make up the sort of story that will do. Once told, you will have to stick to it—and, *having* to stick to it, beware of making it complicated, and beware of making it in a hurry. I will write again about this, and give you my own ideas. In the meantime, don't risk meeting him too often in the park.—Yours, M. O."

"Well?" asked the nurse, returning to the bedside. "Have you done with it?"

"Meeting him in the park?" repeated Mrs. Milroy, with her eyes still fastened on the letter. "*Him*! Rachel, where is the major?"

"In his own room."

"I don't believe it!"

"Have your own way. I want the letter and the envelope."

"Can you close it again so that she won't know?"

"What I can open I can shut. Anything more?"

"Nothing more."

Mrs. Milroy was left alone again, to review her plan of attack by the new light that had now been thrown on Miss Gwilt.

The information that had been gained, by opening the governess's letter, pointed plainly to the conclusion that an adventuress had stolen her way into the house by means of a false reference. But having been obtained by an act of treachery which it was impossible to acknowledge, it was not information that could be used either for warning the major or for exposing Miss Gwilt. The one available weapon in Mrs. Milroy's hands was the weapon furnished by her own returned letter—and the one question to decide was how to make the best and speediest use of it.

The sound of her daughter's voice startled her from the other side of the door.

"May I come in?" asked Neelie.

"What do you want?" returned Mrs. Milroy, impatiently.

"I have brought up your breakfast, mamma."

"My breakfast?" repeated Mrs. Milroy, in surprise. "Why doesn't Rachel bring it up as usual?" She considered a moment, and then called out sharply, "Come in!"

CHAPTER II

THE MAN IS FOUND

Neelie entered the room, carrying the tray with the tea, the dry toast, and the pat of butter which composed the invalid's invariable breakfast.

"What does this mean?" asked Mrs. Milroy, speaking and looking as she might have spoken and looked if the wrong servant had come into the room.

Neelie put the tray down on the bedside table. "I thought I should like to bring you up your breakfast, mamma, for once in a way," she replied, "and I asked Rachel to let me."

"Come here," said Mrs. Milroy, "and wish me good morning."

Neelie obeyed. As she stooped to kiss her mother, Mrs. Milroy caught her by the arm, and turned her roughly to the light. There were plain signs of disturbance and distress in her daughter's face. A deadly thrill of terror ran through Mrs. Milroy on the instant. She suspected that the opening of the letter had been discovered by Miss Gwilt, and that the nurse was keeping out of the way in consequence.

"Let me go, mamma," said Neelie, shrinking under her mother's grasp. "You hurt me."

"Tell me why you have brought up my breakfast this morning," persisted Mrs. Milroy.

"I have told you, mamma.

"You have *not*! You have made an excuse—I see it in your face. Come! what is it?"

Neelie's resolution gave way before her mother's. She looked aside uneasily at the things in the tray. "I have been vexed," she said with an effort; "and I didn't want to stop in the breakfast-room, I wanted to come up here, and to speak to you."

"Vexed? Who has vexed you? What has happened? Has Miss Gwilt anything to do with it?"

Neelie looked round again at her mother in sudden curiosity and alarm. "Mamma!" she said, "you read my thoughts—I declare you frighten me. It *was* Miss Gwilt."

"Come!" said Mrs. Milroy, beginning to lose patience. "You have something to say to me about Miss Gwilt. What is it?"

Neelie forced back her tears, and made an effort to answer.

"She aggravates me beyond endurance, mamma; I can't bear her; I shall do something——" Neelie stopped, and stamped her foot angrily on the floor. I shall throw something at her head, if we go on much longer like this! I should have thrown something this morning if I hadn't left the room. Oh, do speak to papa about it! Do find out some reason for sending her away! I'll go to school—I'll do anything in the world to get rid of Miss Gwilt!"

"To get rid of Miss Gwilt!" At those words—at that echo from her daughter's lips, of the one dominant desire kept secret in her own heart—Mrs. Milroy slowly raised herself in bed. What did it mean? Was the help she wanted coming from the very last of all quarters in which she could have thought of looking for it?

"Why do you want to get rid of Miss Gwilt?" she asked. "What have you got to complain of?"

"Nothing!" said Neelie. "That's the aggravation of it. Miss Gwilt won't let me have anything to complain of. She is perfectly detestable; she is driving me mad; and she is the pink of propriety all the time. I daresay it's wrong, but I don't care—I hate her!"

Mrs. Milroy's eyes questioned her daughter's face. Mrs. Milroy went on probing her way deeper and deeper into Neelie's mind, with a warmer and warmer interest in Neelie's secret.

"Pour me out a cup of tea," she said; "and don't excite yourself, my dear. Why do you speak to *me* about this? why don't you speak to your father?"

"I have tried to speak to papa," said Neelie. "But it's no use; he is too good to know what a wretch she is. She is always on her best behaviour with him; she is always contriving to be useful to him. I can't make him understand why I dislike Miss Gwilt. I can't make *you* understand—I only understand it myself." She tried to pour out the tea, and in trying upset the cup. "I'll go downstairs again!" exclaimed Neelie, with a burst of tears. "I'm not fit for anything—I can't even pour out a cup of tea!"

Mrs. Milroy seized her hand, and stopped her. Trifling as it was, Neelie's reference to the relations between the major and Miss Gwilt had roused her mother's ready jealousy. The restraints which Mrs. Milroy had laid on herself thus far, vanished in a moment—vanished, even in the presence of a girl of sixteen, and that girl her own child!

"If you had had eyes in your head you would never have gone to your father," she said. "Your father has reasons of his own for hearing nothing that you can say, or that anybody can say, against Miss Gwilt."

Many girls at Neelie's age would have failed to see the meaning hidden under those words. It was the daughter's misfortune, in this instance, to have had experience enough of the mother to understand her. Neelie started back from the bedside, with her face in a glow. "Mamma!" she said, "you are talking horribly! Papa is the best and dearest and kindest —oh, I won't hear it!—I won't hear it!"

Mrs. Milroy's fierce temper broke out in an instant—broke out all the more violently from her feeling herself, in spite of herself, to have been in the wrong.

"You impudent little fool!" she retorted furiously, "do you think I want *you* to remind me of what I owe to your father? Am I to learn how to speak of your father, and how to think of your father, and how to love and honour your father, from a forward little minx like you! I was finely disappointed, I can tell you, when you were born—I wished for a boy, you impudent hussy! If you ever find a man who is fool enough to marry you, he will be a lucky man if you only love him half as well, a quarter as well, a hundred-thousandth part as well, as I loved your father. Ah, you can cry when it's too late; you can come creeping back to beg your mother's pardon after you have insulted her. You little dowdy, half-grown creature!"

Neelie fell on her knees at the bedside, and hid her face. In sheer despair of finding comfort and help anywhere else, she had cast herself impulsively on her mother's mercy—and this was how it had ended! "Oh, mamma," she pleaded, "you know I didn't mean to offend you! I couldn't help it when you spoke so of my father. Oh, do, do forgive me."

Mrs. Milroy turned again on her pillow, and looked at her daughter vacantly. "Forgive you?" she repeated with her mind still in the past, groping its way back darkly to the present.

"I beg your pardon, mamma—I beg your pardon on my knees. I am so unhappy; I do so want a little kindness? Won't you forgive me?"

"Wait a little," rejoined Mrs. Milroy. "Ah," she said, after an interval, "now I know! Forgive you? Yes—I'll forgive you on one condition." She lifted Neelie's head, and looked her searchingly in the face. "Tell me why you hate Miss

Gwilt! You've a reason of your own for hating her, and you haven't confessed it yet."

Neelie's head dropped again. The burning colour that she was hiding by hiding her face, showed itself on her neck. Her mother saw it, and gave her time.

"Tell me," reiterated Mrs. Milroy, more gently, "why do you hate her?"

The answer came reluctantly, a word at a time, in fragments.

"Because she is trying——"

"Trying what?"

"Trying to make somebody who is much——"

"Much what?"

"Much too young for her——"

"Marry her?"

"Yes, mamma."

Breathlessly interested, Mrs. Milroy leaned forward, and twined her hand caressingly in her daughter's hair.

"Who is it, Neelie?" she asked, in a whisper.

"You will never say I told you, mamma?"

"Never! Who is it?"

"Mr. Armadale."

Mrs. Milroy leaned back on her pillow in dead silence. The plain betrayal of her daughter's first love, by her daughter's own lips, which would have absorbed the whole attention of other mothers, failed to occupy her for a moment. Her jealousy, distorting all things to fit its own conclusions, was busied in distorting what she had just heard. "A blind," she thought, "which has deceived my girl. It doesn't deceive *me*. Is Miss Gwilt likely to succeed?" she asked aloud. "Does Mr. Armadale show any sort of interest in her?"

Neelie looked up at her mother for the first time. The hardest part of the confession was over now—she had revealed the truth about Miss Gwilt, and she had openly mentioned Allan's name.

"He shows the most unaccountable interest," she said. "It's impossible to understand it. It's downright infatuation—I haven't patience to talk about it!"

"How do *you* come to be in Mr. Armadale's secrets?" inquired Mrs. Milroy. "Has he informed *you*, of all the people in the world, of his interest in Miss Gwilt?"

"Me!" exclaimed Neelie, indignantly. "It's quite bad enough that he should have told papa."

At the reappearance of the major in the narrative, Mrs.

Milroy's interest in the conversation rose to its climax. She raised herself again from the pillow. "Get a chair," she said. "Sit down, child, and tell me all about it. Every word, mind —every word!"

"I can only tell you, mamma, what papa told me."

"When?"

"Saturday. I went in with papa's lunch to the workshop, and he said, 'I have just had a visit from Mr. Armadale; and I want to give you a caution while I think of it.' I didn't say anything, mamma—I only waited. Papa went on, and told me that Mr. Armadale had been speaking to him on the subject of Miss Gwilt, and that he had been asking a question about her which nobody in his position had a right to ask. Papa said he had been obliged, good-humouredly, to warn Mr. Armadale to be a little more delicate, and a little more careful next time. I didn't feel much interested, mamma—it didn't matter to *me* what Mr. Armadale said or did. Why should I care about it?"

"Never mind yourself," interposed Mrs. Milroy, sharply. "Go on with what your father said. What was he doing when he was talking about Miss Gwilt? How did he look?"

"Much as usual, mamma. He was walking up and down the workshop; and I took his arm and walked up and down with him."

"I don't care what *you* were doing," said Mrs. Milroy, more and more irritably. "Did your father tell you what Mr. Armadale's question was—or did he not?"

"Yes, mamma. He said Mr. Armadale began by mentioning that he was very much interested in Miss Gwilt, and he then went on to ask whether papa could tell him anything about her family misfortunes——"

"What!!!" cried Mrs. Milroy. The word burst from her almost in a scream, and the white enamel on her face cracked in all directions. "Mr. Armadale said *that*?" she went on, leaning out farther and farther over the side of the bed.

Neelie started up, and tried to put her mother back on the pillow.

"Mamma!" she exclaimed, "are you in pain? are you ill? You frighten me!"

"Nothing, nothing, nothing," said Mrs. Milroy. She was too violently agitated to make any other than the commonest excuse. "My nerves are bad this morning—don't notice it. I'll try the other side of the pillow. Go on! go on! I'm

listening, though I'm not looking at you." She turned her face to the wall, and clenched her trembling hands convulsively beneath the bed-clothes. "I've got her!" she whispered to herself, under her breath. "I've got her at last!"

"I'm afraid I"ve been talking too much," said Neelie; "I'm afraid I've been stopping here too long. Shall I go downstairs, mamma, and come back later in the day?"

"Go on," repeated Mrs. Milroy, mechanically. "What did your father say next? Anything more about Mr. Armadale?"

"Nothing more, except how papa answered him," replied Neelie. "Papa repeated his own words when he told me about it. He said: 'In the absence of any confidence volunteered by the lady herself, Mr. Armadale, all I know or wish to know—and you must excuse me for saying, all anyone else need know or wish to know—is, that Miss Gwilt gave me a perfectly satisfactory reference before she entered my house.' Severe, mamma, wasn't it? I don't pity him in the least—he richly deserved it. The next thing was papa's caution to *me*. He told me to check Mr. Armadale's curiosity if he applied to me next. As if he was likely to apply to me! and as if I should listen to him if he did! That's all, mamma. You won't suppose, will you, that I have told you this because I want to hinder Mr. Armadale from marrying Miss Gwilt. Let him marry her if he pleases—I don't care!" said Neelie, in a voice that faltered a little, and with a face which was hardly composed enough to be in perfect harmony with a declaration of indifference. "All I want is to be relieved from the misery of having Miss Gwilt for my governess. I'd rather go to school."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Milroy, vacantly. "You're a good girl; you shall go to school."

The cruel brevity of the reply, and the tone in which it was spoken, told Neelie plainly that her mother's attention had been wandering far away from her, and that it was useless and needless to prolong the interview. She turned aside quietly, without a word of remonstrance. It was nothing new in her experience, to find herself shut out from her mother's sympathies. She looked at her eyes in the glass and, pouring out some cold water, bathed her face. "Miss Gwilt shan't see I've been crying!" thought Neelie, as she went back to the bedside to take her leave. "I've tired you out, mamma," she said gently. "Let me go now; and let me come back a little later when you have had some rest."

"Yes," repeated her mother, as mechanically as ever; "a little later when I have had some rest."

Neelie left the room. The minute after the door had closed on her, Mrs. Milroy rang the bell for her nurse. In the face of the narrative she had just heard, in the face of every reasonable estimate of probabilities, she held to her own jealous conclusions as firmly as ever. "Mr. Armadale may believe her, and my daughter may believe her," thought the furious woman. "But I know the major—and she can't deceive *me*!"

The nurse came in. "Prop me up," said Mrs. Milroy. "And give me my desk. I want to write."

"You're excited," replied the nurse. "You're not fit to write."

"Give me the desk," reiterated Mrs. Milroy.

"Anything more?" asked Rachel, repeating her invariable formula as she placed the desk on the bed.

"Yes. Come back in half an hour. I shall want you to take a letter to the great house."

The nurse's sardonic composure deserted her for once. "Mercy on us!" she exclaimed, with an accent of genuine surprise. "What next? You don't mean to say you're going to write——?"

"I am going to write to Mr. Armadale," interposed Mrs. Milroy; "and you are going to take the letter to him, and wait for an answer—and, mind this, not a living soul but our two selves must know of it in the house."

"Why are you writing to Mr. Armadale?" asked Rachel. "And why is nobody to know of it but our two selves?"

"Wait," rejoined Mrs. Milroy; "and you will see."

The nurse's curiosity, being a woman's curiosity, declined to wait.

"I'll help you, with my eyes open," she said. "But I won't help you blindfold."

"Oh, if I only had the use of my limbs!" groaned Mrs. Milroy. "You wretch, if I could only do without you!"

"You have the use of your head," retorted the impenetrable nurse. "And you ought to know better than to trust me by halves, at this time of day."

It was brutally put; but it was true—doubly true, after the opening of Miss Gwilt's letter. Mrs. Milroy gave way.

"What do you want to know?" she asked. "Tell me—and leave me."

"I want to know what you are writing to Mr. Armadale about?"

"About Miss Gwilt."

"What has Mr. Armadale to do with you and Miss Gwilt?"

Mrs. Milroy held up the letter that had been returned to her by the authorities at the Post Office.

"Stoop," she said. "Miss Gwilt may be listening at the door. I'll whisper."

The nurse stopped, with her eye on the door.

"You know that the postman went with this letter to Kingsdown Crescent?" said Mrs. Milroy. "And you know that he found Mrs. Mandeville gone away, nobody could tell where?"

"Well," whispered Rachel, "what next?"

"This, next. When Mr. Armadale gets the letter that I am going to write to him, he will follow the same road as the postman—and we'll see what happens when he knocks at Mrs. Mandeville's door."

"How do you get him to the door?"

"I tell him to go to Miss Gwilt's reference."

"Is he sweet on Miss Gwilt?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" said the nurse. "I see!"

CHAPTER III

THE BRINK OF DISCOVERY

The morning of the interview between Mrs. Milroy and her daughter, at the cottage, was a morning of serious reflection for the squire, at the great house.

Even Allan's easy-tempered nature had not been proof against the disturbing influences exercised on it by the events of the last three days. Midwinter's abrupt departure had vexed him; and Major Milroy's reception of his inquiries relating to Miss Gwilt weighed unpleasantly on his mind. Since his visit to the cottage, he had felt impatient and ill at ease, for the first time in his life, with everybody who came near him. Impatient with Pedgift Junior, who had called on the previous evening to announce his departure for London on business the next day, and to place his services at the disposal of his client; ill at ease with Miss Gwilt, at a secret meeting with her in the park that morning; and ill at ease in his own company, as he now sat moodily smoking in the solitude of his room. "I can't live this sort of life much

longer," thought Allan. "If nobody will help me to put the awkward question to Miss Gwilt, I must stumble on some way of putting it for myself."

What way? The answer to that question was as hard to find as ever. Allan tried to stimulate his sluggish invention by walking up and down the room, and was disturbed by the appearance of the footman at the first turn.

"Now then! what is it?" he asked impatiently.

"A letter, sir; and the person waits for an answer."

Allan looked at the address. It was in a strange handwriting. He opened the letter; and a little note enclosed in it dropped to the ground. The note was directed, still in the strange handwriting, to "Mrs. Mandeville, 18 Kingsdown Crescent, Bayswater. Favoured by Mr. Armadale." More and more surprised, Allan turned for information to the signature at the end of the letter. It was "Anne Milroy."

"Anne Milroy?" he repeated. "It must be the major's wife. What can she possibly want with me?"

By way of discovering what she wanted, Allan did at last what he might more wisely have done at first. He sat down to read the letter.

["Private."] "The Cottage, Monday.

"DEAR SIR,—The name at the end of these lines will, I fear, recall to you a very rude return made on my part, some time since, for an act of neighbourly kindness on yours. I can only say in excuse, that I am a great sufferer, and that if I was ill-tempered enough, in a moment of irritation under severe pain, to send back your present of fruit, I have regretted doing so ever since. Attribute this letter, if you please, to my desire to make some atonement, and to my wish to be of service to our good friend and landlord if I possibly can.

"I have been informed of the question which you addressed to my husband the day before yesterday, on the subject of Miss Gwilt. From all I have heard of you, I am quite sure that your anxiety to know more of this charming person than you know now, is an anxiety proceeding from the most honourable motives. Believing this, I feel a woman's interest —incurable invalid as I am—in assisting you. If you are desirous of becoming acquainted with Miss Gwilt's family circumstances without directly appealing to Miss Gwilt herself, it rests with you to make the discovery—and I will tell you how.

"It so happens that some few days since, I wrote privately

to Miss Gwilt's reference on this very subject. I had long observed that my governess was singularly reluctant to speak of her family and her friends; and without attributing her silence to other than perfectly proper motives I felt it my duty to my daughter to make some inquiry on the subject. The answer I have received is satisfactory as far as it goes. My correspondent informs me that Miss Gwilt's story is a very sad one, and that her own conduct throughout has been praiseworthy in the extreme. The circumstances (of a domestic nature, as I gather) are all plainly stated in a collection of letters now in the possession of Miss Gwilt's reference. This lady is perfectly willing to let me see the letters—but not possessing copies of them, and being personally responsible for their security, she is reluctant, if it can be avoided, to trust them to the post; and she begs me to wait until she or I can find some reliable person who can be employed to transmit the packet from her hands to mine.

"Under these circumstances, it has struck me that you might possibly, with your interest in the matter, be not unwilling to take charge of the papers. If I am wrong in this idea, and if you are not disposed, after what I have told you, to go to the trouble and expense of a journey to London, you have only to burn my letter and enclosure, and to think no more about it. If you decide on becoming my envoy, I gladly provide you with the necessary introduction to Mrs. Mandeville. You have only, on presenting it, to receive the letters in a sealed packet, to send them here on your return to Thorpe-Ambrose, and to wait an early communication from me acquainting you with the result.

"In conclusion, I have only to add that I see no impropriety in your taking (if you feel so inclined) the course that I propose to you. Miss Gwilt's manner of receiving such allusions as I have made to her family circumstances, has rendered it unpleasant for me (and would render it quite impossible for you) to seek information in the first instance from herself.

"In any case, I have one condition to make, which I am sure you will understand to be indispensable. The most innocent actions are liable, in this wicked world, to the worst possible interpretation. I must, therefore, request that you will consider this communication as *strictly private*. I write to you in a confidence which is on no account (until circumstances may, in my opinion, justify the revelation of it) to extend beyond our two selves.

"Believe me, dear sir, truly yours,

"ANNE MILROY."

In this tempting form the unscrupulous ingenuity of the major's wife had set the trap. Without a moment's hesitation, Allan followed his impulses as usual, and walked straight into it—writing his answer, and pursuing his own reflections simultaneously, in a highly characteristic state of mental confusion.

"By Jupiter, this is kind of Mrs. Milroy!" ("My dear madam.") "Just the thing I wanted, at the time when I needed it most!" ("I don't know how to express my sense of your kindness, except by saying that I will go to London and fetch the letters with the greatest pleasure.") "She shall have a basket of fruit regularly every day, all through the season." ("I will go at once, dear madam, and be back to-morrow.") "Ah, nothing like the women for helping one when one is in love! This is just what my poor mother would have done in Mrs. Milroy's place." ("On my word of honour as a gentleman, I will take the utmost care of the letters—and keep the thing strictly private, as you request.") "I would have given five hundred pounds to anybody who would have put me up to the right way to speak to Miss Gwilt—and here is this blessed woman does it for nothing." ("Believe me, my dear madam, gratefully yours, Allan Armadale.")

Allan went to London at once, accompanied by Pedgift Junior, but he failed to locate the mysterious Mrs. Mandeville, either at Kingsdown Crescent, or at a house in Pimlico, to which a cab-driver guided them. The curious Mrs. Mandeville had vanished.

Accordingly he wrote back to Mrs. Milroy:

"Dunn's Hotel, Covent Garden, Tuesday.

"DEAR MADAM,—Pray excuse my not returning to Thorpe-Ambrose to-day, as I said I would. Unforeseen circumstances oblige me to stop in London. I am sorry to say I have not succeeded in seeing Mrs. Mandeville, for which reason I cannot perform your errand; and I beg, therefore, with many apologies, to return the letter of introduction. I hope you will allow me to conclude by saying that I am very much obliged to you for your kindness, and that I will not venture to trespass on it any further.

"I remain, dear madam, yours truly,

"ALLAN ARMADALE."

In those artless words, still entirely unsuspicious of the character of the woman he had to deal with, Allan put the weapon she wanted into Mrs. Milroy's hands.

He wrote a line to Mr. Bashwood, briefly informing the deputy-steward that his absence from Thorpe-Ambrose was likely to be prolonged for some little time, and that any further instructions which might be necessary, under those circumstances, would reach him through Mr. Pedgift the elder. This done, and the letters sent to the post, his thoughts were forced back once more on himself. Again the blank future waited before him to be filled up; and again his heart shrank from it to the refuge of the past.

The evening passed—the next day passed—Thursday morning came, and brought with it a letter for Allan. The direction was in Mrs. Milroy's handwriting; and the form of address adopted in the letter warned Allan the moment he opened it that something had gone wrong.

["Private."] "The Cottage, Thorpe-Ambrose, Wednesday.

"SIR,—I have just received your mysterious letter. It has more than surprised, it has really alarmed me. After having made the friendliest advances to you on my side, I find myself suddenly shut out from your confidence in the most unintelligible and, I must add, the most discourteous manner. It is quite impossible that I can allow the matter to rest where you have left it. The only conclusion I can draw from your letter is, that my confidence must have been abused in some way, and that you know a great deal more than you are willing to tell me. Speaking in the interest of my daughter's welfare, I request that you will inform me what the circumstances are which have prevented your seeing Mrs. Mandeville, and which have led to the withdrawal of the assistance that you unconditionally promised me in your letter of Monday last.

"In my state of health, I cannot involve myself in a lengthened correspondence. I must endeavour to anticipate any objections you may make, and I must say all that I have to say in my present letter. In the event (which I am most unwilling to consider possible) of your declining to accede to the request that I have just addressed to you, I beg to say that I shall consider it my duty to my daughter to have this very unpleasant matter cleared up. If I don't hear from you to my full satisfaction by return of post, I shall be obliged to tell my husband that circumstances have happened which justify us in immediately testing the respectability of Miss Gwilt's

reference. And when he asks me for my authority, I will refer him to you.

"Your obedient servant,

"ANNE MILROY."

In those terms the major's wife threw off the mask, and left her victim to survey at his leisure the trap in which she had caught him. Allan's belief in Mrs. Milroy's good faith had been so implicitly sincere, that her letter simply bewildered him. He saw vaguely that he had been deceived in some way, and that Mrs. Milroy's neighbourly interest in him was not what it had looked on the surface; and he saw no more. The threat of appealing to the major—on which, with a woman's ignorance of the natures of men, Mrs. Milroy had relied for producing its effect—was the only part of the letter to which Allan reverted with any satisfaction: it relieved instead of alarming him. "If there *is* to be a quarrel," he thought, "it will be a comfort, at any rate, to have it out with a man."

Firm in his resolution to shield the unhappy woman whose secret he wrongly believed himself to have surprised, Allan sat down to write his apologies to the major's wife. After setting up three polite declarations, in close marching order, he retired from the field. "He was extremely sorry to have offended Mrs. Milroy. He was innocent of all intention to offend Mrs. Milroy. And he begged to remain Mrs. Milroy's truly." Never had Allan's habitual brevity as a letter-writer done him better service than it did him now. With a little more skilfulness in the use of his pen, he might have given his enemy even a stronger hold on him than the hold she had got already.

The interval-day passed, and with the next morning's post Mrs. Milroy's threat came realised in the shape of a letter from her husband. The major wrote less formally than his wife had written, but his questions were mercilessly to the point.

"The Cottage, Thorpe-Ambrose,

["Private."] "Friday, July 11th, 1851.

"DEAR SIR,—When you did me the favour of calling here a few days since, you asked a question relating to my governess, Miss Gwilt, which I thought rather a strange one at the time, and which caused, as you may remember, a momentary embarrassment between us.

"This morning, the subject of Miss Gwilt has been brought to my notice again in a manner which has caused me the utmost astonishment. In plain words, Mrs. Milroy has informed me that Miss Gwilt has exposed herself to the suspicion of having deceived us by a false reference. On my expressing the surprise which such an extraordinary statement caused me, and requesting that it might be instantly substantiated, I was still further astonished by being told to apply for all particulars to no less a person than Mr. Armadale. I have vainly requested some further explanation from Mrs. Milroy; she persists in maintaining silence, and in referring me to yourself.

"Under these extraordinary circumstances, I am compelled, in justice to all parties, to ask you certain questions, which I will endeavour to put as plainly as possible, and which I am quite ready to believe (from my previous experience of you) that you will answer frankly on your side.

"I beg to inquire in the first place, whether you admit or deny Mrs. Milroy's assertion that you have made yourself acquainted with particulars relating either to Miss Gwilt or to Miss Gwilt's reference, of which I am entirely ignorant? In the second place, if you admit the truth of Mrs. Milroy's statement, I request to know how you became acquainted with those particulars? Thirdly, and lastly, I beg to ask you what the particulars are?

"If any special justification for putting these questions be needed—which, purely as a matter of courtesy towards yourself, I am willing to admit—I beg to remind you that the most precious charge in my house, the charge of my daughter, is confided to Miss Gwilt; and that Mrs. Milroy's statement places you, to all appearance, in the position of being competent to tell me whether that charge is properly bestowed or not.

"I have only to add that, as nothing has thus far occurred to justify me in entertaining the slightest suspicion either of my governess or her reference, I shall wait before I make any appeal to Miss Gwilt until I have received your answer—which I shall expect by return of post.

"Believe me, dear sir, faithfully yours,

"DAVID MILROY."

This transparently straightforward letter at once dissipated the confusion which had thus far existed in Allan's mind: he saw the snare in which he had been caught (though he was

still necessarily at a loss to understand why it had been set for him), as he had not seen it yet. Mrs. Milroy had clearly placed him between two alternatives—the alternative of putting himself in the wrong, by declining to answer her husband's questions; or the alternative of meanly sheltering his responsibility behind the responsibility of a woman, by acknowledging to the major's own face that the major's wife had deceived him. In this difficulty Allan acted as usual, without hesitation. His pledge to Mrs. Milroy to consider their correspondence private still bound him, disgracefully as she had abused it. And his resolution was as immovable as ever to let no earthly consideration tempt him into betraying Miss Gwilt. "I may have behaved like a fool," he thought, "but I won't break my word; and I won't be the means of turning that miserable woman adrift in the world again."

He wrote to the major as artlessly and briefly as he had written to the major's wife. He declared his unwillingness to cause a friend and neighbour any disappointment, if he could possibly help it. On this occasion he had no other choice. The questions the major asked him were questions which he could not consent to answer. He was not very clever at explaining himself, and he hoped he might be excused for putting it in that way, and saying no more.

Monday's post brought with it Major Milroy's rejoinder, and closed the correspondence.

"The Cottage, Thorpe-Ambrose, Sunday.

"SIR,—Your refusal to answer my questions, unaccompanied as it is by even the shadow of an excuse for such a proceeding, can be interpreted but in one way. Besides being an implied acknowledgment of the correctness of Mrs. Milroy's statement, it is also an implied reflection on my governess's character. As an act of justice towards a lady who lives under the protection of my roof, and who has given me no reason whatever to distrust her, I shall now show our correspondence to Miss Gwilt: and I shall repeat to her the conversation which I had with Mrs. Milroy on the subject, in Mrs. Milroy's presence.

"One word more respecting the future relations between us, and I have done. My ideas on certain subjects are, I daresay, the ideas of an old-fashioned man. In my time, we had a code of honour by which we regulated our actions. According to that code, if a man made private inquiries into a lady's affairs, without being either her husband, her father, or her brother, he subjected himself to the responsibility of justifying

his conduct in the estimation of others; and if he evaded that responsibility, he abdicated the position of a gentleman. It is quite possible that this antiquated way of thinking exists no longer; but it is too late for me, at my time of life, to adopt more modern views. I am scrupulously anxious, seeing that we live in a country and a time in which the only court of honour is a police court, to express myself with the utmost moderation of language upon this the last occasion that I shall have to communicate with you. Allow me, therefore, merely to remark, that our ideas of the conduct which is becoming in a gentleman, differ seriously; and permit me on this account to request that you will consider yourself for the future as a stranger to my family and to myself.

"Your obedient servant,

"DAVID MILROY."

The Monday morning on which his client received the major's letter, was the blackest Monday that had yet been marked in Pedgift's calendar. When Allan's first angry sense of the tone of contempt in which his friend and neighbour pronounced sentence on him had subsided, it left him sunk in a state of depression from which no efforts made by his travelling companion could rouse him for the rest of the day. Reverting naturally, now that his sentence of banishment had been pronounced, to his early intercourse with the cottage, his memory went back to Neelie, more regretfully and more penitently than it had gone back to her yet. "If *she* had shut the door on me, instead of her father," was the bitter reflection with which Allan now reviewed the past, "I shouldn't have had a word to say against it; I should have felt it served me right."

The next day passed, to Allan's relief, without bringing any letters. The spirits of Pedgift rose sympathetically with the spirits of his client. Towards dinner-time he reverted to the *mens sana in corpore sano* of the ancients, and issued his orders to the head-waiter more royally than ever.

Thursday came, and brought the fatal postman with more news from Norfolk. A letter-writer now stepped on the scene who had not appeared there yet; and the total overthrow of all Allan's plans for a visit to Somersetshire was accomplished on the spot.

Pedgift Junior happened that morning to be first at the breakfast-table. When Allan came in, he relapsed into his professional manner, and offered a letter to his patron with a bow performed in dreary silence.

"For me?" inquired Allan, shrinking instinctively from a new correspondent.

"For you, sir—from my father," replied Pedgift, "enclosed in one to myself. Perhaps you will allow me to suggest, by way of preparing you for—for something a little unpleasant,—that we shall want a particularly good dinner to-day;—and (if they're not performing any modern German music to-night) I think we should do well to finish the evening melodiously at the opera."

"Something wrong at Thorpe-Ambrose?" asked Allan.

"Yes, Mr. Armadale; something was wrong at Thorpe-Ambrose."

Allan sat down resignedly, and opened the letter.

"High Street, Thorpe-Ambrose.

["Private and Confidential."] "17th July, 1851.

"DEAR SIR,—I cannot reconcile it with my sense of duty to your interests, to leave you any longer in ignorance of reports current in this town and its neighbourhood, which, I regret to say, are reports affecting yourself.

"To begin at the beginning. It is asserted that a correspondence took place last week between Major Milroy and yourself; in which you cast a very serious suspicion on Miss Gwilt's respectability, without defining your accusation, and without (on being applied to) producing your proofs. Upon this, the major appears to have felt it his duty (while assuring his governess of his own firm belief in her respectability) to inform her of what had happened, in order that she might have no future reason to complain of his having had any concealments from her in a matter affecting her character. Very magnanimous on the major's part; but you will see directly that Miss Gwilt was more magnanimous still. After expressing her thanks in a most becoming manner, she requested permission to withdraw herself from Major Milroy's service.

"Various reports are in circulation as to the governess's reason for taking this step.

"The authorised version (as sanctioned by the resident gentry) represents Miss Gwilt to have said that she could not condescend—in justice to herself, and in justice to her highly respectable reference—to defend her reputation against undefined imputations cast on it by a comparative stranger. At the same time it was impossible for her to pursue such

a course of conduct as this, unless she possessed a freedom of action which was quite incompatible with her continuing to occupy the dependent position of a governess. For that reason she felt it incumbent on her to leave her situation. But while doing this, she was equally determined not to lead to any misinterpretation of her motives, by leaving the neighbourhood. No matter at what inconvenience to herself, she would remain long enough at Thorpe-Ambrose to await any more definitely-expressed imputations that might be made on her character, and to repel them publicly the instant they assumed a tangible form.

"It is, I think, quite impossible that you can permit yourself to be spoken of as you are spoken of now, without stirring personally in the matter. You have unluckily made many enemies here, and foremost among them is my colleague, Mr. Darch. He has been showing everywhere a somewhat rashly-expressed letter you wrote to him, on the subject of letting the cottage to Major Milroy instead of to himself; and it has helped to exasperate the feeling against you. It is roundly stated in so many words, that you have been prying into Miss Gwilt's family affairs, with the most dishonourable motives; that you have tried, for a profligate purpose of your own, to damage her reputation, and to deprive her of the protection of Major Milroy's roof; and that, after having been asked to substantiate by proof the suspicions that you have cast on the reputation of a defenceless woman, you have maintained a silence which condemns you in the estimation of all honourable men.

"It may, perhaps, help to show you the necessity there is for your return, if I mention one other assertion respecting yourself, which is in everybody's mouth. Your absence is, I regret to tell you, attributed to the meanest of all motives. It is said that you are remaining in London because you are afraid to show your face at Thorpe-Ambrose.

"Believe me, dear sir, your faithful servant,

"A. PEDGIFT, SENR."

Allan was of an age to feel the sting contained in the last sentence of his lawyer's letter. He started to his feet in a paroxysm of indignation, which revealed his character to Pedgift Junior in an entirely new light.

"Where's the time-table?" cried Allan. "I must go back to Thorpe-Ambrose by the next train! If it doesn't start directly, I'll have a special engine. I must and will go back instantly, and I don't care two straws for the expenses!"

"Suppose we telegraph to my father, sir?" suggested the judicious Pedgift. "It's the quickest way of expressing your feelings, and the cheapest."

"So it is," said Allan. "Thank you for reminding me of it. Telegraph to them! Tell your father to give every man in Thorpe-Ambrose the lie direct, in my name. Put it in capital letters, Pedgift—put it in capital letters!"

Pedgift smiled and shook his head. If he was acquainted with no other variety of human nature, he thoroughly knew the variety that exists in country towns.

"It won't have the least effect on them, Mr. Armadale," he remarked quietly. "They'll only go on lying harder than ever. If you want to upset the whole town, one line will do it. With five shillingsworth of human labour and electric fluid, sir (I dabble a little in science after business hours), we'll explode a bombshell in Thorpe-Ambrose!" He produced the bombshell on a slip of paper as he spoke:—"A. Pedgift Junior, to A. Pedgift Senior.—Spread it all over the place that Mr. Armadale is coming down by the next train."

"More words," suggested Allan, looking over his shoulder. "Make it stronger."

"Leave my father to make it stronger, sir," returned the wary Pedgift. "My father is on the spot—and his command of language is something quite extraordinary." He rang the bell, and despatched the telegram.

Now that something had been done, Allan subsided gradually into a state of composure. He looked back again at Mr. Pedgift's letter, and then handed it to Mr. Pedgift's son.

"Can you guess your father's plan for setting me right in the neighbourhood?" he asked.

Pedgift the younger shook his wise head. "His plan appears to be connected in some way, sir, with his opinion of Miss Gwilt."

"I wonder what he thinks of her?" said Allan.

"I shouldn't be surprised, Mr. Armadale," returned Pedgift Junior, "if his opinion staggers you a little, when you come to hear it. My father has had a large legal experience of the shady side of the sex—and he learnt his profession at the Old Bailey."

Allan made no further inquiries. He seemed to shrink from pursuing the subject, after having started it himself. "Let's be doing something to kill the time," he said. "Let's pack up and pay the bill."

They packed up, and paid the bill. The hour came, and the train left for Norfolk at last.

While the travellers were on their way back, a somewhat longer telegraphic message than Allan's was flashing its way past them along the wires in the reverse direction—from Thorpe-Ambrose to London. The message was in cypher; and the signs being interpreted, it ran thus:—"From Lydia Gwilt to Maria Oldershaw—Good news! He is coming back. I mean to have an interview with him. Everything looks well. Now I have left the cottage, I have no women's prying eyes to dread, and I can come and go as I please. Mr. Midwinter is luckily out of the way. I don't despair of becoming Mrs. Armadale yet. Whatever happens, depend on my keeping away from London, until I am certain of not taking any spies after me to your place. I am in no hurry to leave Thorpe-Ambrose. I mean to be even with Miss Milroy first."

Shortly after that message was received in London, Allan was back again in his own house. It was evening—Pedgift Junior had just left him—and Pedgift Senior was expected to call on business in half an hour's time.

CHAPTER IV

PEDGIFT'S REMEDY

After waiting to hold a preliminary consultation with his son, Mr. Pedgift the elder set forth alone for his interview with Allan at the great house.

"Good evening, Mr. Armadale. Many thanks for your prompt attention to my very disagreeable letter," said Pedgift Senior, opening the conversation cheerfully the moment he entered his client's house. "I hope you understand, sir, that I had really no choice under the circumstances but to write as I did?"

"I have very few friends, Mr. Pedgift," returned Allan simply. "And I am sure you are one of the few."

"Much obliged, Mr. Armadale. I have always tried to deserve your good opinion, and I mean, if I can, to deserve it now."

"Mr. Pedgift," cried Allan, "I want to talk to you about how I am to meet the lies that are being told of me in this

place. Only point me out any one man," he cried, with a rising voice and a mounting colour—"any one man who says I am afraid to show my face in the neighbourhood; and I'll horsewhip him publicly before another day is over his head!"

"There are two ways of stepping out of your present awkward position, sir—a short way, and a long way," replied Pedgift Senior. "The short way (which is always the best) has occurred to me since I have heard of your proceedings in London from my son. I understand that you permitted him, after you received my letter, to take me into your confidence. I have drawn various conclusions from what he has told me, which I may find it necessary to trouble you with presently. In the meantime I should be glad to know under what circumstances you went to London to make these unfortunate inquiries about Miss Gwilt? Was it your own notion to pay that visit to Mrs. Mandeville? or were you acting under the influence of some other person?"

Allan hesitated. "I can't honestly tell you it was my own notion," he replied—and said no more.

"I thought as much!" remarked Pedgift Senior in high triumph. "The short way out of our present difficulty, Mr. Armadale, lies straight through that other person, under whose influence you acted. That other person must be presented forthwith to public notice, and must stand in that other person's proper place. The name if you please, sir, to begin with—we'll come to the circumstances directly."

"I am sorry to say, Mr. Pedgift, that we must try the longest way, if you have no objection," replied Allan quietly. "The short way happens to be a way I can't take on this occasion."

"Very good, sir," said the lawyer, accepting his defeat without the slightest loss of temper. "The choice rests with you, and you have chosen. We will go the long way. It starts (allow me to inform you) from my office; and it leads (as I strongly suspect) through a very miry road to—Miss Gwilt.'

Allan looked at his legal adviser in speechless astonishment.

"If you won't expose the person who is responsible, in the first instance, sir, for the inquiries to which you unfortunately lent yourself," proceeded Mr. Pedgift the elder, "the only other alternative, in your present position, is to justify the inquiries themselves."

"And how is that to be done?" inquired Allan.

"By proving to the whole neighbourhood, Mr. Armadale,

what I firmly believe to be the truth—that the pet object of the public protection is an adventuress of the worst class; an undeniably worthless and dangerous woman. In plainer English still, sir, by employing time enough and money enough to discover the truth about Miss Gwilt."

Before Allan could say a word in answer, there was an interruption at the door. After the usual preliminary knock, one of the servants came in.

"I told you I was not to be interrupted," said Allan irritably. "Good heavens! am I never to have done with them? another letter!"

"Yes, sir," said the man, holding it out. "And," he added, speaking words of evil omen in his master's ears, "the person waits for an answer."

Allan looked at the address of the letter with a natural expectation of encountering the handwriting of the major's wife. The anticipation was not realised. His correspondent was plainly a lady, but the lady was not Mrs. Milroy.

"Who can it be?" he said, looking mechanically at Pedgift Senior as he opened the envelope.

Pedgift Senior gently tapped his snuff-box, and said without a moment's hesitation—"Miss Gwilt."

Allan opened the letter. The first two words in it were the echo of the two words the lawyer had just pronounced. It *was* Miss Gwilt!

Once more, Allan looked at his legal adviser in speechless astonishment.

"I have known a good many of them in my time, sir," explained Pedgift Senior, with a modesty equally rare and becoming in a man of his age. "Not as handsome as Miss Gwilt, I admit. But quite as bad, I dare say. Read your letter, Mr. Armadale—read your letter."

Allan read these lines:—

"Miss Gwilt presents her compliments to Mr. Armadale, and begs to know if it will be convenient to him to favour her with an interview, either this evening or to-morrow morning. Miss Gwilt offers no apology for making her present request. She believes Mr. Armadale will grant it as an act of justice towards a friendless woman whom he has been innocently the means of injuring, and who is earnestly desirous to set herself right in his estimation."

Allan handed the letter to his lawyer in silent perplexity and distress.

The face of Mr. Pedgift the elder expressed but one feeling

when he had read the letter in his turn and had handed it back—a feeling of profound admiration. "What a lawyer she would have made," he exclaimed, fervently, "if she had only been a man!"

"I can't treat this as lightly as you do, Mr. Pedgift," said Allan. "It's dreadfully distressing to me. I was so fond of her," he added, in a lower tone—"I was so fond of her once."

Mr. Pedgift Senior suddenly became serious on his side.

"Do you mean to say, sir, that you actually contemplate seeing Miss Gwilt?" he asked, with an expression of genuine dismay.

"I can't treat her cruelly," returned Allan. "I have been the means of injuring her—without intending it, God knows! —I can"t treat her cruelly after that!"

"Mr. Armadale," said the lawyer, "you did me the honour, a little while since, to say that you considered me your friend. May I presume on that position to ask you a question or two, before you go straight to your own ruin?"

"Any questions you like," said Allan, looking back at the letter—the only letter he had ever received from Miss Gwilt.

"You have had one trap set for you already, sir, and you have fallen into it. Do you want to fall into another?"

"You know the answer to that question, Mr. Pedgift, as well as I do."

"I'll try again, Mr. Armadale; we lawyers are not easily discouraged. Do you think that any statement Miss Gwilt might make to you, if you do see her, would be a statement to be relied on, after what you and my son discovered in London?"

"She might explain what we discovered in London," suggested Allan, still looking at the writing, and thinking of the hand that had traced it.

"*Might* explain it? My dear sir, she is quite certain to explain it! I will do her justice: I believe she would make out a case without a single flaw in it from beginning to end."

"You seem to have a very bad opinion of Miss Gwilt," said Allan.

"The worst possible opinion, Mr. Armadale," retorted Pedgift Senior, coolly. "We will return to that, when we have sent the lady's messenger about his business. Will you take my advice? Will you decline to see her?"

"I would willingly decline—it would be so dreadfully distressing to both of us," said Allan. "I would willingly decline, if I only knew how."

"Bless my soul, Mr. Armadale, it's easy enough! Don't commit yourself in writing. Send out to the messenger, and say there's no answer."

The short course thus suggested, was a course which Allan positively declined to take. "It's treating her brutally," he said; "I can't and won't do it."

Once more, the pertinacity of Pedgift the elder found its limits—and once more that wise man yielded gracefully to a compromise. On receiving his client's promise not to see Miss Gwilt, he consented to Allan's committing himself to writing—under his lawyer's dictation. The letter thus produced was modelled in Allan's own style; it began and ended in one sentence. "Mr. Armadale presents his compliments to Miss Gwilt, and regrets that he cannot have the pleasure of seeing her at Thorpe-Ambrose." Allan had pleaded hard for a second sentence, explaining that he only declined Miss Gwilt's request from a conviction that an interview would be needlessly distressing on both sides. But his legal adviser firmly rejected the proposed addition to the letter. "When you say No to a woman, sir," remarked Pedgift Senior, "always say it in one word. If you give her your reasons, she invariably believes that you mean Yes."

Producing that little gem of wisdom from the rich mine of his professional experience, Mr. Pedgift the elder sent out the answer to Miss Gwilt's messenger, and recommended the servant to "see the fellow, whoever he was, well clear of the house."

"Now, sir," said the lawyer, "we will come back, if you like, to my opinion of Miss Gwilt. It doesn't at all agree with yours, I'm afraid. You think her an object for pity—quite natural at your age. I think her an object for the inside of a prison—quite natural at mine. You shall hear the grounds on which I have formed my opinion directly. Let me show you that I am in earnest by putting the opinion itself, in the first place, to a practical test. Do you think Miss Gwilt is likely to persist in paying you a visit, Mr. Armadale, after the answer you have just sent to her?"

"Quite impossible!" cried Allan, warmly. "Miss Gwilt is a lady; after the letter I have sent to her, she will never come near me again."

"There we join issue, sir," cried Pedgift Senior. "I say she will snap her fingers at your letter (which was one of the reasons why I objected to your writing it). I say, she is in all probability waiting her messenger's return, in or near your

grounds at this moment. I say, she will try to force her way in here, before four-and-twenty hours more are over your head. Egad, sir!" cried Mr. Pedgift, looking at his watch, "it's only seven o'clock now. She's bold enough and clever enough to catch you unawares this very evening. Permit me to ring for the servant—permit me to request that you will give him orders immediately to say you are not at home. You needn't hesitate, Mr. Armadale! If you're right about Miss Gwilt, it's a mere formality. If I'm right it's a wise precaution. Back your opinion, sir," said Mr. Pedgift, ringing the bell, "I back mine!"

Allan was sufficiently nettled when the bell rang, to feel ready to give the order. But when the servant came in, past remembrances got the better of him, and the words stuck in his throat. "You give the order," he said to Mr. Pedgift—and walked away abruptly to the window. "You're a good fellow!" thought the old lawyer, looking after him, and penetrating his motive on the instant. "The claws of that she-devil shan't scratch you if I can help it."

The servant waited inexorably for his orders.

"If Miss Gwilt calls here, either this evening, or at any other time," said Pedgift Senior, "Mr. Armadale is not at home. Wait! If she asks when Mr. Armadale will be back, you don't know. Wait! If she proposes coming in and sitting down, you have a general order that nobody is to come in and sit down, unless they have a previous appointment with Mr. Armadale. Come!" cried old Pedgift, rubbing his hands cheerfully when the servant had left the room, "I've stopped her out now, at any rate! The orders are all given, Mr. Armadale. We may go on with our conversation."

Allan came back from the window. "The conversation is not a very pleasant one," he said. "No offence to you, but I wish it was over."

"We will get it over as soon as possible, sir," said Pedgift Senior, still persisting as only lawyers and women *can* persist, in forcing his way little by little nearer and nearer to his own object. "Let us go back, if you please, to the practical suggestion which I offered to you when the servant came in with Miss Gwilt's note. There is, I repeat, only one way left for you, Mr. Armadale, out of your present awkward position. You must pursue your inquiries about this woman to an end—on the chance (which I consider next to a certainty) that the end will justify you in the estimation of the neighbourhood."

"I wish to God I had never made any inquiries at all!" said Allan. "Nothing will induce me, Mr. Pedgift, to make any more."

"Why?" asked the lawyer.

"Can you ask me why," retorted Allan, hotly, "after your son has told you what we found out in London? Even if I had less cause to be—to be sorry for Miss Gwilt than I have; even if it was some other woman, do you think I would inquire any further into the secret of a poor betrayed creature—much less expose it to the neighbourhood? I should think myself as great a scoundrel as the man who has cast her out helpless on the world, if I did anything of the kind. I wonder you can ask me the question—upon my soul, I wonder you can ask me the question!"

"Give me your hand, Mr. Armadale!" cried Pedgift Senior, warmly; "I honour you for being so angry with me. The neighbourhood may say what it pleases; you're a gentleman, sir, in the best sense of the word. Now," pursued the lawyer, dropping Allan's hand, and lapsing back instantly from sentiment to business, "just hear what I have got to say in my own defence. Suppose Miss Gwilt's real position happens to be nothing like what you are generously determined to believe it to be?"

"We have no reason to suppose that," said Allan resolutely.

"Such is your opinion, sir," persisted Pedgift. "Mine, founded on what is publicly known of Miss Gwilt's proceedings here, and on what I have seen of Miss Gwilt herself, is that she is as far as I am from being the sentimental victim you are inclined to make her out. Gently, Mr. Armadale! remember that I have put my opinion to a practical test, and wait to condemn it off-hand until events have justified you. Let me put my points, sir—make allowances for me as a lawyer—and let me put my points. You and my son are young men; and I don't deny that the circumstances, on the surface, appear to justify the interpretation which, as young men, you have placed on them. I am an old man—I know that circumstances are not always to be taken as they appear on the surface—and I possess the great advantage, in the present case, of having had years of professional experience among some of the wickedest women who ever walked this earth."

Allan opened his lips to protest, and checked himself, in despair of producing the slightest effect. Pedgift Senior bowed in polite acknowledgment of his client's self-restraint, and took instant advantage of it to go on.

"All Miss Gwilt's proceedings," he resumed, "since your unfortunate correspondence with the major, show me that she is an old hand at deceit. The moment she is threatened with exposure—exposure of some kind, there can be no doubt, after what you discovered in London—she turns your honourable silence to the best possible account, and leaves the major's service in the character of a martyr. Once out of the house, what does she do next? She boldly stops in the neighbourhood, and serves three excellent purposes by doing so. In the first place, she shows everybody that she is not afraid of facing another attack on her reputation. In the second place, she is close at hand to twist you round her little finger, and to become Mrs. Armadale in spite of circumstances, if you (and I) allow her the opportunity. In the third place, if you (and I) are wise enough to distrust her, she is equally wise on her side, and doesn't give us the first great chance of following her to London, and associating her with her accomplices. Is this the conduct of an unhappy woman who has lost her character in a moment of weakness, and who has been driven unwillingly into a deception to get it back again?"

"You put it cleverly," said Allan, answering with marked reluctance; "I can't deny that you put it cleverly."

"Your own common sense, Mr. Armadale, is beginning to tell you that I put it justly," said Pedgift Senior. "I don't presume to say yet what this woman's connection may be with those people at Pimlico. All I assert is, that it is not the connection you suppose. Having stated the facts so far, I have only to add my own personal impression of Miss Gwilt. I won't shock you, if I can help it—I'll try if I can't put it cleverly again. She came to my office (as I told you in my letter), no doubt to make friends with your lawyer, if she could—she came to tell me in the most forgiving and Christian manner, that she didn't blame *you*."

"Do you ever believe in anybody, Mr. Pedgift?" interposed Allan.

"Sometimes, Mr. Armadale," returned Pedgift the elder, as unabashed as ever. "I believe as often as a lawyer can. To proceed, sir. When I was in the criminal branch of practice, it fell to my lot to take instructions for the defence of women committed for trial, from the women's own lips. Whatever other difference there might be among them, I got, in time, to notice, among those who were particularly wicked and unquestionably guilty, one point in which they all resembled each other. Tall and short, old and young, handsome and ugly, they all had a secret self-possession that nothing

could shake. Miss Gwilt was in tears, sir—becoming tears that didn't make her nose red—and I put my finger suddenly on the weak point in *her* story. Down dropped her pathetic pocket-handkerchief from her beautiful blue eyes, and out came the genuine woman with the neat little lie that exactly suited the circumstances! I felt twenty years younger, Mr. Armadale, on the spot. I declare I thought I was in Newgate again, with my note-book in my hand, taking my instructions for the defence!"

"The next thing you'll say, Mr. Pedgift," cried Allan, angrily, "is that Miss Gwilt has been in prison!"

Pedgift Senior calmly rapped his snuff-box, and had his answer ready at a moment's notice.

"She may have richly deserved to see the inside of a prison, Mr. Armadale. Differ with me as strongly as you please—but don't make up your mind finally about Miss Gwilt, until events have put those two opposite opinions of ours to the test that I have proposed. A fairer test there can't be. I agree with you, that no lady worthy of the name could attempt to force her way in here, after receiving your letter. But I deny that Miss Gwilt *is* worthy of the name; and I say she will try to force her way in here in spite of you."

"And I say she won't!" retorted Allan firmly.

Pedgift Senior leaned back in his chair and smiled. There was a momentary silence—and in that silence, the door-bell rang.

The lawyer and the client both looked expectantly in the direction of the hall.

"No!" cried Allan, more angrily than ever.

"Yes!" said Pedgift Senior, contradicting him with the utmost politeness.

"Anybody for me?" asked Allan, when the servant came in.

"The man looked at Pedgift Senior, with an expression of unutterable reverence, and answered—"Miss Gwilt."

"I don't want to crow over you, sir," said Mr. Pedgift the elder, when the servant had withdrawn. "But what do you think of Miss Gwilt *now*?"

Allan shook his head in silent discouragement and distress.

"Time is of some importance, Mr. Armadale. After what has just happened, do you still object to taking the course I have had the honour of suggesting to you?"

"I can't. Mr. Pedgift," said Allan. "I can't be the means

of disgracing her in the neighbourhood. I would rather be disgraced myself—as I am."

"Let me put it in another way, sir. Excuse my persisting. You have been very kind to me and my family; and I have a personal interest, as well as a professional interest in you. If you can't prevail on yourself to show this woman's character in its true light, will you take common precautions to prevent her doing any more harm? Will you consent to having her privately watched, as long as she remains in this neighbourhood?"

For the second time, Allan shook his head.

"Is that your final resolution, sir?"

"It is, Mr. Pedgift; but I am much obliged to you for your advice, all the same."

Pedgift Senior rose in a state of gentle resignation, and took up his hat. "Good evening, sir," he said, and made sorrowfully for the door. Allan rose on his side, innocently supposing that the interview was at an end. Persons better acquainted with the diplomatic habits of his legal adviser, would have recommended him to keep his seat. The time was ripe for "Pedgift's postscript", and the lawyer's indicative snuff-box was at that moment in one of his hands, as he opened the door with the other.

"Good evening," said Allan.

Pedgift Senior opened the door—stopped—considered—closed the door again—came back mysteriously with his pinch of snuff in suspense between his box and his nose—and repeating his invariable formula, "By-the-by, there's a point occurs to me," quietly resumed possession of his empty chair.

Allan, wondering, took the seat, in his turn, which he had just left. Lawyer and client looked at each other once more, and the inexhaustible interview began again.

CHAPTER V

PEDGIFT'S POSTSCRIPT

"I mentioned that a point had occurred to me, sir," remarked Pedgift Senior.

"You did," said Allan.

"Would you like to hear what it is, Mr. Armadale?"

"If you please," said Allan.

"With all my heart, sir! This is the point. I attach considerable importance—if nothing else can be done—to having Miss Gwilt privately looked after, as long as she stops at Thorpe-Ambrose. It struck me just now at the door, Mr. Armadale, that what you are not willing to do for your own security, you might be wiling to do for the security of another person."

"What other person?" inquired Allan.

"A young lady who is a near neighbour of yours, sir. Shall I mention the name, in confidence? Miss Milroy."

Allan started, and changed colour.

"Miss Milroy!" he repeated. "Can *she* be concerned in this miserable business? I hope not, Mr. Pedgift; I sincerely hope not."

"I paid a visit, in your interests, sir, at the cottage, this morning," proceeded Pedgift Senior. "You shall hear what happened there, and judge for yourself. Major Milroy has been expressing his opinion of you pretty freely; and I thought it highly desirable to give him a caution. It's always the way with those quiet addle-headed men—when they do once wake up, there's no reasoning with their obstinacy, and no quieting their violence. Well, sir, this morning I went to the cottage. The major and Miss Neelie were both in the parlour—miss not looking so pretty as usual; pale, I thought, pale, and worn, and anxious. Up jumps the addle-headed major (I wouldn't give *that*, Mr. Armadale, for the brains of a man who can occupy himself for half a lifetime in making a clock!)—up jumps the addle-headed major, in the loftiest manner, and actually tries to look me down. Ha! ha! the idea of anybody looking *me* down, at my time of life. I behaved like a Christian; I nodded kindly to old What's-o'clock. 'Fine morning, major,' says I. 'Have you any business with me?' says he. 'Just a word,' says I. Miss Neelie, like the sensible girl she is, gets up to leave the room; and what does her ridiculous father do? He stops her. 'You needn't go, my dear; I have nothing to say to Mr. Pedgift,' says this old military idiot, and turns my way, and tries to look me down again. 'You are Mr. Armadale's lawyer,' says he; 'if you come on any business relating to Mr. Armadale, I refer you to my solicitor.' (His solicitor is Darch; and Darch has had enough of *me* in business, I can tell you!) 'My errand here, major, does certainly relate to Mr. Armadale,' says I; 'but it doesn't concern your lawyer—at any rate, just yet. I wish to

caution you to suspend your opinion of my client, or, if you won't do that, to be careful how you express it in public. I warn you that our turn is to come, and that you are not at the end yet, of this scandal about Miss Gwilt.' It struck me as likely that he would lose his temper when he found himself tackled in that way, and he amply fulfilled my expectations. He was quite violent in his language—the poor weak creature—actually violent with *me*! I behaved like a Christian again; I nodded kindly, and wished him good morning. When I looked round to wish Miss Neelie good morning too, she was gone. You seem restless, Mr. Armadale," remarked Pedgift Senior, as Allan, feeling the sting of old recollections, suddenly started out of his chair, and began pacing up and down the room. "I won't try your patience much longer, sir; I am coming to the point."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pedgift," said Allan, returning to his seat, and trying to look composedly at the lawyer through the intervening image of Neelie which the lawyer had called up.

"Well, sir, I left the cottage," resumed Pedgift Senior. "Just as I turned the corner from the garden into the park who should I stumble on but Miss Neelie herself, evidently on the look-out for me. 'I want to speak to you for one moment, Mr. Pedgift!' says she. 'Does Mr. Armadale think *me* mixed up in this matter?' She was violently agitated—tears in her eyes, sir, of the sort which my legal experience has *not* accustomed me to see. I quite forgot myself; I actually gave her my arm, and led her away gently among the trees. (A nice position to find me in, if any of the scandal-mongers of the town had happened to be walking in that direction!) 'My dear Miss Milroy,' says I, 'why should Mr. Armadale think *you* mixed up in it?"

"You ought to have told her at once that I thought nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Allan, indignantly. "Why did you leave her for a moment in doubt about it?"

"Because I am a lawyer, Mr. Armadale," rejoined Pedgift Senior, drily. "Even in moments of sentiment, under convenient trees, with a pretty girl on my arm, I can't entirely divest myself of my professional caution. Don't look distressed, sir, pray! I set things right in due course of time. Before I left Miss Milroy, I told her, in the plainest terms, no such idea had ever entered your head."

"Did she seem relieved?" asked Allan.

"She was able to dispense with the use of my arm, sir,"

replied old Pedgift, as drily as ever, "and to pledge me to inviolable secrecy on the subject of our interview. She was particularly desirous that *you* should hear nothing about it. If you are at all anxious on your side, to know why I am now betraying her confidence, I beg to inform you that her confidence related to no less a person than the lady who favoured you with a call just now—Miss Gwilt."

Allan, who had been once more restlessly pacing the room, stopped, and returned to his chair.

"Is this serious?" he asked.

"Most serious, sir," returned Pedgift Senior. "I am betraying Miss Neelie's secret, in Miss Neelie's own interest. Let us go back to that cautious question I put to her. She found some little difficulty in answering it—for the reply involved her in a narrative of the parting interview between her governess and herself. This is the substance of it. The two were alone when Miss Gwilt took leave of her pupil; and the words she used (as reported to me by Miss Neelie) were these. She said, 'Your mother has declined to allow me to take leave of her. Do you decline too?' Miss Neelie's answer was a remarkably sensible one for a girl of her age. 'We have not been good friends,' she said, 'and I believe we are equally glad to part with each other. But I have no wish to decline taking leave of you.' Saying that she held out her hand. Miss Gwilt stood looking at her steadily, without taking it, and addressed her in these words:—'*You are not Mrs. Armadale yet.*' Gently, sir! Keep your temper. It's not at all wonderful that a woman conscious of having her own mercenary designs on you, should attribute similar designs to a young lady who happens to be your near neighbour. Let me go on. Miss Neelie, by her own confession (and quite naturally, I think) was excessively indignant. She owns to having answered, 'You shameless creature, how dare you say that to me!' Miss Gwilt's rejoinder was rather a remarkable one—the anger, on her side, appears to have been of the cool, still, venomous kind. 'Nobody ever yet injured me, Miss Milroy,' she said, 'without sooner or later bitterly repenting it. *You* will bitterly repent it.' She stood looking at her pupil for a moment in dead silence, and then left the room. Miss Neelie appears to have felt the imputation fastened on her, in connection with you, far more sensitively than she felt the threat. She had previously known, as everybody had known in the house that some unacknowledged proceedings of yours in London had led to Miss Gwilt's voluntary withdrawal from her situation. And she now inferred, from

the language addressed to her, that she was actually believed by Miss Gwilt to have set those proceedings on foot, to advance herself, and to injure her governess in your estimation. Gently, sir, gently! I haven't quite done yet. As soon as Miss Neelie had recovered herself, she went upstairs to speak to Mrs. Milroy. Miss Gwilt's abominable imputation had taken her by surprise; and she went to her mother first for enlightment and advice. She got neither the one nor the other. Mrs. Milroy declared she was too ill to enter on the subject, and she has remained too ill to enter on it ever since. Miss Neelie applied next to her father. The major stopped her the moment your name passed her lips: he declared he would never hear you mentioned again by any member of his family. She has been left in the dark from that time to this—not knowing how she might have been misrepresented by Miss Gwilt, or what falsehoods you might have been led to believe of her. At my age and in my profession, I don't profess to have any extraordinary softness of heart. But I do think, Mr. Armadale, that Miss Neelie's position deserves our sympathy."

"I'll do anything to help her!" cried Allan, impulsively. "You don't know, Mr. Pedgift, what reason I have——" He checked himself, and confusedly repeated his first words. "I'll do anything," he reiterated earnestly—"anything in the world to help her!"

"Do you really mean that, Mr. Armadale? Excuse my asking—but you can very materially help Miss Neelie if you choose!"

"How?" asked Allan. "Only tell me how!"

"By giving me your authority, sir, to protect her from Miss Gwilt."

Having fired that shot point-blank at his client, the wise lawyer waited a little to let it take its effect before he said any more.

Allan's face clouded, and he shifted uneasily from side to side of his chair.

"Your son is hard enough to deal with, Mr. Pedgift," he said, "and you are harder than your son."

"Thank you, sir," rejoined the ready Pedgift, "in my son's name and my own, for a handsome compliment to the firm. If you really wish to be of assistance to Miss Neelie," he went on more seriously, "I have shown you the way. You can do nothing to quiet her anxiety, which I have not done already. As soon as I had assured her that no misconception

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of her conduct existed in your mind, she went away satisfied. Her governess's parting threat doesn't seem to have dwelt on her memory. I can tell you, Mr. Armadale, it dwells on mine! You know my opinion of Miss Gwilt; and you know what Miss Gwilt herself has done this very evening, to justify that opinion even in your eyes. May I ask, after all that has passed, whether you think she is the sort of woman who can be trusted to confine herself to empty threats?"

The question was a formidable one to answer. Forced steadily back from the position which he had occupied at the outset of the interview, by the irresistible pressure of plain facts, Allan began for the first time to show symptoms of yielding on the subject of Miss Gwilt. "Is there no other way of protecting Miss Milroy but the way you have mentioned?" he asked uneasily.

"Do you think the major would listen to you, sir, if you spoke to him?" asked Pedgift Senior sarcastically; "I'm rather afraid he wouldn't honour *me* with his attention. Or perhaps you would prefer alarming Miss Neelie by telling her in plain words that we both think her in danger? Or, suppose you send me to Miss Gwilt, with instructions to inform her that she has done her pupil a cruel injustice? Women are so proverbially ready to listen to reason; and they are so universally disposed to alter their opinions of each other on application—especially when one woman thinks that another woman has destroyed her prospect of making a good marriage. Don't mind *me*, Mr. Armadale—I'm only a lawyer, and I can sit waterproof under another shower of Miss Gwilt's tears!"

"Damn it, Mr. Pedgift, tell me in plain words what you want to do!" cried Allan, losing his temper at last.

"In plain words, Mr. Armadale, I want to keep Miss Gwilt's proceedings privately under view, as long as she stops in this neighbourhood. I answer for finding a person who will look after her delicately and discreetly. And I agree to discontinue even this harmless superintendence of her actions, if there isn't good reason shown for continuing it, to your entire satisfaction, in a week's time. I make that moderate proposal, sir, in what I sincerely believe to be Miss Milroy's interest, and I wait your answer, Yes or No."

"Can't I have time to consider?" asked Allan, driven to the last helpless expedient of taking refuge in delay.

"Certainly, Mr. Armadale. But don't forget, while you are considering, that Miss Milroy is in the habit of walking

out alone in your park, innocent of all apprehension of danger —and that Miss Gwilt is perfectly free to take any advantage of that circumstance that Miss Gwilt pleases."

"Do as you like!" exclaimed Allan in despair. "And, for God's sake, don't torment me any longer!"

Popular prejudice may deny it—but the profession of the law is a practically Christian profession in one respect at least. Of all the large collection of ready answers lying in wait for mankind on a lawyer's lips, none is kept in better working order than "the soft answer which turneth away wrath." Pedgift Senior rose with the alacrity of youth in his legs, and the wise moderation of age on his tongue. "Many thanks, sir," he said, "for the attention you have bestowed on me. I congratulate you on your decision, and I wish you good evening." This time, his indicative snuff-box was not in his hand when he opened the door, and he actually disappeared, without coming back for a second postscript.

Allan's head sank on his breast, when he was left alone. "If it was only the end of the week!" he thought longingly. "If I only had Midwinter back again!"

As the aspiration escaped the client's lips, the lawyer got gaily into his gig. "Hie away, old girl!" cried Pedgift Senior, patting the fast-trotting mare with the end of his whip. "I never keep a lady waiting—and I've got business to-night with one of your own sex!"

CHAPTER VI

THE MARTYRDOM OF MISS GWILT

The outskirts of the little town of Thorpe-Ambrose, on the side nearest to "the great house," have earned some local celebrity as exhibiting the prettiest suburb of the kind to be found in East Norfolk. Here, the villas and gardens are for the most part laid out in excellent taste; the trees are in the prime of their growth; and the healthy common beyond the houses, rises and falls in picturesque and delightful variety of broken ground.

The sun had set, and the summer twilight was darkening. Moving slowly past the heaps of bricks rising at intervals along the road; coasting carefully round the old iron, and the broken tiles scattered here and there in his path, Mr. Bash-

wood advanced from the direction of the country towards one of the unfinished streets of the suburb. His personal appearance had been apparently made the object of some special attention. His false teeth were brilliantly white; his wig was carefully brushed; his mourning garments, renewed throughout, gleamed with the hideous and slimy gloss of cheap black cloth. He moved with a nervous jauntiness, and looked about him with a vacant smile. Having reached the first of the skeleton cottages, his watery eyes settled steadily for the first time on the view of the street before him. The next instant he started; his breath quickened; he leaned trembling and flushing against the unfinished wall at his side. A lady, still at some distance, was advancing towards him down the length of the street. "She's coming!" he whispered, with a strange mixture of rapture and fear, of alternating colour and paleness, showing itself in his haggard face. "I wish I was the ground she treads on! I wish I was the glove she's got on her hand!" He burst ecstatically into those extravagant words, with a concentrated intensity of delight in uttering them that actually shook his feeble figure from head to foot.

Smoothly and gracefully the lady glided nearer and nearer, until she revealed to Mr. Bashwood's eyes, what Mr. Bashwood's instincts had recognised in the first instance—the face of Miss Gwilt.

"Mr. Bashwood!" she exclaimed, in loud clear tones indicative of the utmost astonishment, "what a surprise to find you here! I thought none but the wretched inhabitants ever ventured near this side of the town. Hush!" she added quickly in a whisper.—"You heard right, when you heard that Mr. Armadale was going to have me followed and watched. There's a man behind one of the houses. We must talk out loud of indifferent things, and look as if we had met by accident. Ask me what I am doing. Out loud! Directly! You shall never see me again, if you don't instantly leave off trembling, and do what I tell you!"

She spoke with a merciless tyranny of eye and voice—with a merciless use of her power over the feeble creature whom she addressed. Mr. Bashwood obeyed her in tones that quavered with agitation, and with eyes that devoured her beauty in a strange fascination of terror and delight.

"I am trying to earn a little money by teaching music," she said, in the voice intended to reach the spy's ears. "If you are able to recommend me any pupils, Mr. Bashwood,

your good word will oblige me. Have you been in the grounds to-day?" she went on, dropping her voice again to a whisper. "Has Mr. Armadale been near the cottage? Has Miss Milroy been out of the garden? No? Are you sure? Look out for them to-morrow, and next day, and next day. They are certain to meet and make it up again, and I must and will know of it. Hush! Ask me my terms for teaching music. What are you frightened about? It's me the man's after—not you. Louder than when you asked me what I was doing, just now; louder, or I won't trust you any more; I'll go to somebody else!"

Once more Mr. Bashwood obeyed. "Don't be angry with me," he murmured faintly, when he had spoken the necessary words. "My heart beats so—you'll kill me!"

"You poor old dear!" she whispered back, with a sudden change in her manner—with an easy satirical tenderness. "What business have you with a heart at your age? Be here to-morrow at the same time, and tell me what you have seen in the grounds. My terms are only five shillings a lesson," she went on, in her louder tone; "I'm sure that's not much, Mr. Bashwood,—I give such long lessons, and I get all my pupils' music half-price." She suddenly dropped her voice again, and looked him brightly into instant subjection. "Don't let Mr. Armadale out of your sight to-morrow! If that girl manages to speak to him, and if I don't hear of it, I'll frighten you to death. If I *do* hear of it, I'll kiss you! Hush! Wish me good-night, and go on to the town, and leave me to go the other way. I don't want you—I'm not afraid of the man behind the houses; I can deal with him by myself. Say good-night, and I'll let you shake hands. Say it louder, and I'll give you one of my flowers, if you promise not to fall in love with it." She raised her voice again. "Good-night, Mr. Bashwood! Don't forget my terms. Five shillings a lesson, and the lessons last an hour at a time, and I get all my pupils' music half-price, which is an immense advantage, isn't it?" She slipped a flower into his hand—frowned him into obedience, and smiled to reward him for obeying, at the same moment—lifted her dress again above the impurities of the road—and went on her way with a dainty and indolent deliberation, as a cat goes on her way when she has exhausted the enjoyment of frightening a mouse.

Smoothly and gracefully, carefully preserving the speckless integrity of her dress, never hastening her pace, and never looking aside to the right hand or the left, Miss Gwilt pursued her way towards the open country. The suburban road

branched off at its end in two directions. On the left the path wound through a ragged little coppice, to the grazing grounds of a neighbouring farm. On the right, it led across a hillock of waste land to the high road. Stopping a moment to consider, but not showing the spy that she suspected him, by glancing behind her, while there was a hiding-place within his reach, Miss Gwilt took the path across the hillock. "I'll catch him there," she said to herself, looking up quietly at the long straight line of the empty high road.

Once on the ground that she had chosen for her purpose, she met the difficulties of the position with perfect tact and self-possession. After walking some thirty yards along the road, she let her nosegay drop—half turned round, in stooping to pick it up—saw the man stopping at the same moment behind her—and instantly went on again, quickening her pace, little by little, until she was walking at the top of her speed. The spy fell into the snare laid for him. Seeing the night coming, and fearing that he might lose sight of her in the darkness, he rapidly lessened the distance between them. Miss Gwilt went on faster and faster, till she plainly heard his footsteps behind her—then stopped—turned—and met the man face to face the next moment.

"My compliments to Mr. Armadale," she said, "and tell him I've caught him watching me."

"I'm not watching you, miss," retorted the spy, thrown off his guard by the daring plainness of the language in which she had spoken to him.

Miss Gwilt's eyes measured him contemptuously from head to foot. He was a weakly, undersized man. She was the taller, and (quite possibly) the stronger of the two.

"Take your hat off, you blackguard, when you speak to a lady," she said—and tossed his hat in an instant across a ditch by which they were standing, into a pool on the other side.

This time the spy was on his guard. He knew as well as Miss Gwilt knew, the use which might be made of the precious minutes, if he turned his back on her, and crossed the ditch to recover his hat, "It's well for you you're a woman," he said, standing scowling at her bareheaded in the fast-darkening light.

Miss Gwilt glanced sidelong down the onward vista of the road, and saw, through the gathering obscurity, the solitary figure of a man, rapidly advancing towards her. Some women would have noticed the approach of a stranger at that hour and

in that lonely place with a certain anxiety. Miss Gwilt was too confident in her own powers of persuasion not to count on the man's assistance beforehand, whoever he might be, *because* he was a man. She looked back at the spy with redoubled confidence in herself, and measured him contemptuously from head to foot for the second time.

"I wonder whether I'm strong enough to throw you after your hat?" she said. "I'll take a turn and consider it."

She sauntered on a few steps towards the figure advancing along the road. The spy followed her close. "Try it," he said brutally. "You're a fine woman—you're welcome to put your arms round me if you like." As the words escaped him, he too saw the stranger for the first time. He drew back a step and waited. Miss Gwilt, on her side, advanced a step and waited too.

The stranger came on, with the lithe light step of a practised walker, swinging a stick in his hand, and carrying a knapsack on his shoulders. A few paces nearer, and his face became visible. He was a dark man, his black hair was powdered with dust, and his black eyes were looking steadfastly forward along the road before him.

Miss Gwilt advanced with the first signs of agitation she had shown yet. "Is it possible?" she said softly. "Can it really be you!"

It was Midwinter, on his way back to Thorpe-Ambrose, after his fortnight among the Yorkshire moors.

He stopped and looked at her, in breathless surprise. The image of the woman had been in his thoughts, at the moment when the woman herself spoke to him. "Miss Gwilt!" he exclaimed, and mechanically held out his hand.

She took it, and pressed it gently. "I should have been glad to see you at any time," she said. "You don't know how glad I am to see you now. May I trouble you to speak to that man? He has been following me, and annoying me, all the way from the town."

Midwinter stepped past her, without uttering a word. Faint as the light was, the spy saw what was coming in his face, and turning instantly, leapt the ditch by the roadside. Before Midwinter could follow, Miss Gwilt's hand was on his shoulder.

"No," she said. "You don't know who his employer is."

Midwinter stopped, and looked at her.

"Strange things have happened since you left us," she

went on. "I have been forced to give up my situation, and I am followed and watched by a paid spy. Don't ask who forced me out of my situation, and who pays the spy—at least not just yet. I can't make up my mind to tell you till I am a little more composed. Let the wretch go. Do you mind seeing me safe back to my lodging? It's in your way home. May I—may I ask for the support of your arm? My little stock of courage is quite exhausted." She took his arm and clung close to it.

They went on towards the town and reached the modest little lodging, in the miserable little suburb. Miss Gwilt sighed, and removed her glove before she took Midwinter's hand. "I have taken refuge here," she said simply. "It is clean and quiet—I am too poor to want or expect more. We must say good-bye, I suppose, unless—" she hesitated modestly, and satisfied herself by a quick look round that they were unobserved—"unless you would like to come in and rest a little? I feel so gratefully towards you, Mr. Midwinter! Is there any harm, do you think, in my offering you a cup of tea?"

The magnetic influence of her touch was thrilling through him while she spoke. Change and absence to which he had trusted to weaken her hold on him, had treacherously strengthened it instead. A man exceptionally sensitive, a man exceptionally pure in his past life, he stood hand in hand in the tempting secrecy of the night, with the first woman who had exercised over him the all-absorbing influence of her sex. At his age, and in his position, who could have left her? The man (with a man's temperament) doesn't live who could have left her. Midwinter went in.

A stupid, sleepy lad opened the house-door. Even he, being a male creature, brightened under the influence of Miss Gwilt. "The urn, John," she said, kindly, "and another cup and saucer. I'll borrow your candle to light my candles upstairs—and then I won't bother you any more to-night." John was wakeful and active in an instant. "No trouble, miss," he said with awkward civility. Miss Gwilt took his candle with a smile. "How good people are to me!" she whispered innocently to Midwinter, as she led the way upstairs to the little drawing-room on the first floor.

She lit the candles, and, turning quickly on her guest, stopped him at the first attempt he made to remove his knapsack from his shoulders. "No," she said, gently. "In the good old times, there were occasions when the ladies unarmed

their knights. I claim the privilege of unarming *my* knight." Her dexterous fingers intercepted his at the straps and buckles, and she had the dusty knapsack off, before he could protest against her touching it.

Some time later.

"Should I be wrong," she asked, "if I guessed that you have something on your mind—something which neither my tea nor my talk can charm away? Are men as curious as women? Is the something—Me?"

Midwinter struggled against the fascination of looking at her and listening to her. "I am very anxious to hear what has happened since I've been away," he said. "But I am still more anxious, Miss Gwilt, not to distress you by speaking of a painful subject."

She looked at him gratefully. "It is for your sake that I have avoided the painful subject," she said, toying with her spoon among the dregs in her empty cup. "But you will hear about it from others, if you don't hear about it from me; and you ought to know why you found me in that strange situation, and why you see me here. Pray remember one thing to begin with. I don't blame your friend Mr. Armadale —I blame the people whose instrument he is."

Midwinter started. "Is it possible," he began, "that Allan can be in any way answerable——?" He stopped, and looked at Miss Gwilt in silent astonishment.

She gently laid her hand on his. "Don't be angry with me for telling only the truth," she said. "Your friend is answerable for everything that has happened to me—innocently answerable, Mr. Midwinter, I firmly believe. We are both victims. *He* is the victim of his position as the richest single man in the neighbourhood; and I am the victim of Miss Milroy's determination to marry him."

"Miss Milroy?" repeated Midwinter, more and more astonished. "Why, Allan himself told me——" He stopped again.

"He told you that I was the object of his admiration? Poor fellow, he admires everybody—his head is almost as empty as this," said Miss Gwilt, smiling indicatively into the hollow of her cup. She dropped the spoon, sighed, and became serious again. "I am guilty of the vanity of having let him admire me," she went on penitently, "without the excuse of being able, on my side, to reciprocate even the passing interest that he felt in me. I don't undervalue his many

admirable qualities, or the excellent position he can offer to his wife. But a woman's heart is not to be commanded—no, Mr. Midwinter, not even by the fortunate master of Thorpe-Ambrose who commands everything else."

She looked him full in the face as she uttered that magnanimous sentiment. His eyes dropped before hers, and his dark colour deepened. He had felt his heart leap in him at the declaration of her indifference to Allan. For the first time since they had known each other, his interests now stood self-revealed before him as openly adverse to the interests of his friend.

"I have been guilty of the vanity of letting Mr. Armadale admire me, and I have suffered for it," resumed Miss Gwilt. "If there had been any confidence between my pupil and me, I might have easily satisfied her that she might become Mrs. Armadale—if she could—without having any rivalry to fear on my part. But Miss Milroy disliked and distrusted me from the first. She took her own jealous view, no doubt, of Mr. Armadale's thoughtless attentions to me. It was her interest to destroy the position, such as it was, that I held in his estimation; and it is quite likely her mother assisted her. Mrs. Milroy had her motive also (which I am really ashamed to mention) for wishing to drive me out of the house. Anyhow, the conspiracy has succeeded. I have been forced (with Mr. Armadale's help) to leave the major's service. Don't be angry, Mr. Midwinter! don't form a hasty opinion! I daresay Miss Milroy has some good qualities, though I have not found them out; and I assure you again and again that I don't blame Mr. Armadale—I only blame the people whose instrument he is."

"How is he their instrument? How can he be the instrument of any enemy of yours!" asked Midwinter. "Pray excuse my anxiety, Miss Gwilt—Allan's good name is as dear to me as your own!"

Miss Gwilt's eyes turned full on him again, and Miss Gwilt's heart abandoned itself innocently to an outburst of enthusiasm. "How I admire your earnestness!" she said. "How I like your anxiety for your friend! Oh, if women could only form such friendships! Oh, you happy, happy men!" Her voice faltered, and her convenient teacup absorbed her for the third time. "I would give all the little beauty I possess," she said, "if I could only find such a friend as Mr. Armadale has found in *you*. I never shall, Mr. Midwinter, I never shall. Let us go back to what we

were talking about. I can only tell you how your friend is concerned in my misfortunes, by telling you something first about myself. I am like many other governesses; I am the victim of sad domestic circumstances. It may be weak of me, but I have a horror of alluding to them among strangers. My silence about my family and my friends exposes me to misinterpretation in my dependent position. Does it do me any harm, Mr. Midwinter, in your estimation?"

"God forbid!" said Midwinter, fervently. "There is no man living," he went on, thinking of his own family story, "who has better reason to understand and respect your silence than I have."

Miss Gwilt seized his hand impulsively. "Oh," she said, "I knew it, the first moment I saw you! I knew that you too had suffered, that you too had sorrows which you kept sacred! Strange, strange sympathy! I believe in mesmerism —do you?" She suddenly recollected herself and shuddered. "Oh, what have I done? what must you think of me?" she exclaimed, as he yielded to the magnetic fascination of her touch, and forgetting everything but the hand that lay warm in his own, bent over it and kissed it. "Spare me!" she said, faintly, as she felt the burning touch of his lips. "I am so friendless, I am so completely at your mercy!"

He turned away from her, and hid his face in his hands—he was trembling, and she saw it. She looked at him, while his face was hidden from her—she looked at him with a furtive interest and surprise. "How that man loves me!" she thought. "I wonder whether there was a time once when I might have loved *him*?"

The silence between them remained unbroken for some minutes. He had felt her appeal to his consideration as she had never expected or intended him to feel it—he shrank from looking at her or from speaking to her again.

"Shall I go on with my story?" she asked. "Shall we forget and forgive on both sides?" A woman's inveterate indulgence for every expression of a man's admiration which keeps within the limits of personal respect, curved her lips gently into a charming smile. She looked down meditatively at her dress, and brushed a crumb off her lap with a little fluttering sigh. "I was telling you," she went on, "of my reluctance to speak to strangers of my sad family story. It was in that way, as I afterwards found out, that I laid myself open to Miss Milroy's malice and Miss Milroy's suspicion. Private inquiries about me were addressed to the lady who

was my reference—at Miss Milroy's suggestion, in the first instance, I have no doubt. I am sorry to say, this is not the worst of it. By some underhand means of which I am quite ignorant, Mr. Armadale's simplicity was imposed on—and when application was made secretly to my reference in London, it was made, Mr. Midwinter, through your friend."

Midwinter suddenly rose from his chair and looked at her. The fascination that she exercised over him, powerful as it was, became a suspended influence, now that the plain disclosure came plainly at last from her lips. He looked at her, and sat down again like a man bewildered, without uttering a word.

"Remember how weak he is," pleaded Miss Gwilt gently, "and make allowances for him as I do. The trifling accident of his failing to find my reference at the address given him seems, I can't imagine why, to have excited Mr. Armadale's suspicion. At any rate, he remained in London. What he did there, it is impossible for me to say. I was quite in the dark; I knew nothing; I distrusted nobody; I was as happy in my little round of duties as I could be with a pupil whose affections I had failed to win—when, one morning, to my indescribable astonishment, Major Milroy showed me a correspondence between Mr. Armadale and himself. He spoke to me in his wife's presence. Poor creature, I make no complaint of her—such affliction as she suffers excuses everything. I wish I could give you some idea of the letters between Major Milroy and Mr. Armadale—but my head is only a woman's head, and I was so confused and distressed at the time! All I can tell you is, that Mr. Armadale chose to preserve silence about his proceedings in London, under circumstances which made that silence a reflection on my character. The major was most kind; his confidence in me remained unshaken — but could his confidence in me protect me against his wife's prejudice and his daughter's ill-will? Oh, the hardness of women to each other! Oh, the humiliation if men only knew some of us as we really are! What could I do? I couldn't defend myself against mere imputations; I couldn't remain in my situation after a slur had been cast on me. My pride (Heaven help me, I was brought up like a gentlewoman, and I have sensibilities that are not blunted even yet!)—my pride got the better of me, and I left my place. Don't let it distress you, Mr. Midwinter! There's a bright side to the picture. The ladies in the neighbourhood have overwhelmed me with kindness; I have the prospect of getting pupils to teach; I am spared the mortifica-

tion of going back to be a burden on my friends. The only complaint I have to make is I think a just one. Mr. Armadale has been back at Thorpe-Ambrose for some days. I have entreated him, by letter, to grant me an interview; to tell me what dreadful suspicions he has of me, and to let me set myself right in his estimation. Would you believe it? he has declined to see me—under the influence of others, not of his own free will, I am sure! Cruel, isn't it? But he has even used me more cruelly still—he persists in suspecting me—it is he who is having me watched. Oh, Mr. Midwinter, don't hate me for telling you what you *must* know! The man you found persecuting me and frightening me to-night was only earning his money after all as Mr. Armadale's spy."

Once more Midwinter started to his feet; and this time the thoughts that were in him found their way into words.

"I can't believe it; I won't believe it!" he exclaimed, indignantly. "If the man told you that, the man lied. I beg your pardon, Miss Gwilt; I beg your pardon from the bottom of my heart. Don't, pray don't think I doubt *you;* I only say there is some dreadful mistake. I am not sure that I understand as I ought all that you have told me. But this last infamous meanness of which you think Allan guilty, I *do* understand. I swear to you, he is incapable of it! Some scoundrel has been taking advantage of him; some scoundrel has been using his name. I'll prove it to you if you will only give me time. Let me go and clear it up at once. I can't rest; I can't bear to think of it; I can't even enjoy the pleasure of being here. Oh," he burst out desperately, "I'm sure you feel for me, after what you have said—I feel so for *you*!"

He stopped in confusion. Miss Gwilt's eyes were looking at him again; and Miss Gwilt's hand had found its way once more into his own.

"You are the most generous of living men," she said softly; "I will believe what you tell me to believe. Go," she added in a whisper, suddenly releasing his hand, and turning away from him. "For both our sakes, go!"

His heart beat fast; he looked at her as she dropped into a chair and put her handkerchief to her eyes. For one moment he hesitated—the next, he snatched up his knapsack from the floor, and left her precipitately, without a backward look, or a parting word.

She rose when the door closed on him. A change came over her the instant she was alone. The colour faded out of her cheeks; the beauty died out of her eyes; her face hardened

horribly with a silent despair. "It's even baser work than I bargained for," she said, "to deceive *him*." After pacing to and fro in the room for some minutes, she stopped wearily before the glass over the fireplace. "You strange creature!" she murmured, leaning her elbows on the mantelpiece, and languidly addressing the reflection of herself in the glass. "Have you got any conscience left? And has that man roused it?"

The reflection of her face changed slowly. The colour returned to her cheeks, the delicious languor began to suffuse her eyes again. Her lips parted gently, and her quickening breath began to dim the surface of the glass. She drew back from it, after a moment's absorption in her own thoughts, with a start of terror. "What am I doing?" she asked herself in a sudden panic of astonishment. "Am I mad enough to be thinking of him in *that* way?"

She burst into a mocking laugh, and opened her desk on the table recklessly with a bang. "It's high time I had some talk with mother Jezebel," she said, and sat down to write to Mrs. Oldershaw.

"I have met with Mr. Midwinter," she began, "under very lucky circumstances; and I have made the most of my opportunity. He has just left me for his friend Armadale; and one of two good things will happen to-morrow. If they don't quarrel, the doors of Thorpe-Ambrose will be opened to me again at Mr. Midwinter's intercession. If they do quarrel, I shall be the unhappy cause of it, and I shall find my way in for myself, on the purely Christian errand of reconciling them."

She hesitated at the next sentence, wrote the first few words of it, scratched them out again, and petulantly tore the letter into fragments and threw the pen to the other end of the room. Turning quickly on her chair, she looked at the seat which Midwinter had occupied; her foot restlessly tapping the floor, and her handkerchief thrust like a gag between her clenched teeth. "Young as you are," she thought, with her mind reviving the image of him in the empty chair—"there has been something out of the common in *your* life—and I must and will know it!"

The house-clock struck the hour and roused her. She sighed, and walking back to the glass, wearily loosened the fastenings of her dress; wearily removed the studs from the chemisette beneath it, and put them on the chimney-piece. She looked indolently at the reflected beauties of her neck and

bosom, as she unplaited her hair and threw it back in one great mass over her shoulders. "Fancy," she thought, "if he saw me now!" She turned back to the table, and sighed again as she extinguished one of the candles and took the other in her hand. "Midwinter?" she said, as she passed through the folding-doors of the room to her bedchamber. "I don't believe in his name, to begin with!"

CHAPTER VII

SHE COMES BETWEEN THEM

Towards nine o'clock on the morning after his return, Midwinter knocked at Allan's door; and, on entering the room, found it empty. After inquiry among the servants, it appeared that Allan had risen that morning before the man who usually attended on him was up, and that his hot water had been brought to the door by one of the housemaids, who was then still in ignorance of Midwinter's return. Nobody had chanced to see the master, either on the stairs or in the hall; nobody had heard him ring the bell for breakfast as usual. In brief, nobody knew anything about him, except what was obviously clear to all—that he was not in the house.

Midwinter went out under the great portico. He stood at the head of the flight of steps considering in which direction he should set forth to look for his friend. Allan's unexpected absence added one more to the disquieting influences which still perplexed his mind. He was in the mood in which trifles irritate a man, and fancies are all-powerful to exalt or depress his spirits.

The sky was cloudy; and the wind blew in puffs from the south—there was every prospect, to weather-wise eyes, of coming rain. While Midwinter was still hesitating, one of the grooms passed him on the drive below. The man proved, on being questioned, to be better informed about his master's movements than the servants indoors. He had seen Allan pass the stables more than an hour since, going out by the back way into the park, with a nosegay in his hand.

A nosegay in his hand? The nosegay hung incomprehensibly on Midwinter's mind as he walked round, on the chance of meeting Allan, to the back of the house. "What does the nosegay mean?" he asked himself with an unin-

telligible sense of irritation, and a petulant kick at a stone that stood in his way.

Towards ten o'clock the well-remembered sound of Allan's voice became suddenly audible in the direction of the stables. In a moment more he was visible from the garden. The nosegay was still in his hand; and he was resignedly making a present of it to one of the coachman's children.

Midwinter impulsively took a step forward towards the stables, and abruptly checked his further progress.

Conscious that his position towards his friend was altered already in relation to Miss Gwilt, the first sight of Allan filled his mind with a sudden distrust of the governess's influence over him, which was almost a distrust of himself. He knew that he had set forth from the moors on his return to Thorpe-Ambrose with the resolution of acknowledging the passion that had mastered him, and of insisting, if necessary, on a second and a longer absence in the interests of the sacrifice which he was bent on making to the happiness of his friend. What had become of that resolution now? The discovery of Miss Gwilt's altered position, and the declaration that she had voluntarily made of her indifference to Allan, had scattered it to the winds. The first words with which he would have met his friend, if nothing had happened to him on the homeward way, were words already dismissed from his lips. He drew back as he felt it, and struggled with an instinctive loyalty towards Allan, to free himself at the last moment from the influence of Miss Gwilt.

Having disposed of his useless nosegay, Allan passed on into the garden, and the instant he entered it, recognised Midwinter with a loud cry of surprise and delight.

"Am I awake or dreaming?" he exclaimed, seizing his friend excitably by both hands. "You dear old Midwinter, have you sprung up out of the ground, or have you dropped from the clouds?"

It was not till Midwinter had explained the mystery of his unexpected appearance in every particular, that Allan could be prevailed on to say a word about himself. When he did speak, he shook his head ruefully, and subdued the hearty loudness of his voice, with a preliminary look round to see if the servants were within hearing.

"I've learnt to be cautious since you went away and left me," said Allan. "My dear fellow, you haven't the least notion what things have happened, and what an awful scrape I'm in at this very moment!"

"You are mistaken, Allan. I have heard more of what has happened than you suppose."

"What! the dreadful mess I'm in with Miss Gwilt? the row with the major? the infernal scandal-mongering in the neighbourhood? You don't mean to say——?"

"Yes," interposed Midwinter quietly, "I have heard of it all."

"Good heavens! how? Did you stop at Thorpe-Ambrose on your way back? Have you been in the coffee-room at the hotel? Have you met Pedgift? Have you dropped into the Reading Rooms, and seen what they call the freedom of the press in the town newspaper?"

Midwinter paused before he answered, and looked up at the sky. The clouds had been gathering unnoticed over their heads, and the first rain-drops were beginning to fall.

"Come in here," said Allan. "We'll go up to breakfast this way." He led Midwinter through the open French window into his own sitting-room. The wind blew towards that side of the house, and the rain followed them in. Midwinter, who was last, turned and closed the window.

Allan was too eager for the answer which the weather had interrupted, to wait for it till they reached the breakfast-room. He stopped close at the window, and added two more to his string of questions.

"How can you possibly have heard about me and Miss Gwilt?" he asked. "Who told you?"

"Miss Gwilt herself," replied Midwinter gravely.

Allan's manner changed the moment the governess's name passed his friend's lips.

"I wish you had heard my story first," he said. "Where did you meet with Miss Gwilt?"

There was a momentary pause. They both stood still at the window, absorbed in the interest of the moment. They both forgot that their contemplated place of shelter from the rain had been the breakfast-room upstairs.

"Before I answer your question," said Midwinter a little constrainedly, "I want to ask you something, Allan, on my side. Is it really true that you are in some way concerned in Miss Gwilt's leaving Major Milroy's service?"

There was another pause. The disturbance which had begun to appear in Allan's manner palpably increased.

"It's rather a long story," he began. "I have been taken in, Midwinter. I've been imposed on by a person, who—I

can't help saying it—who cheated me into promising what I oughtn't to have promised, and doing what I had better not have done. It isn't breaking my promise to tell *you*. I can trust in your discretion, can't I? You will never say a word, will you?"

"Stop!" said Midwinter. "Don't trust me with any secrets which are not your own. If you have given a promise, don't trifle with it, even in speaking to such an intimate friend as I am." He laid his hand gently and kindly on Allan's shoulder. "I can't help seeing that I have made you a little uncomfortable," he went on. "I can't help seeing that my question is not so easy a one to answer as I had hoped and supposed. Shall we wait a little? shall we go upstairs and breakfast first?"

Allan was far too earnestly bent on presenting his conduct to his friend in the right aspect, to heed Midwinter's suggestion. He spoke eagerly on the instant, without moving from the window.

"My dear fellow, it's a perfectly easy question to answer. Only—" He hesitated. "Only it requires what I'm a bad hand at—it requires an explanation."

"Do you mean," asked Midwinter more seriously, but not less gently than before, "that you must first justify yourself, and then answer my question?"

"That's it!" said Allan, with an air of relief. "You've hit the right nail on the head, just as usual."

Midwinter's face darkened for the first time. "I am sorry to hear it," he said; his voice sinking low, and his eyes dropping to the ground as he spoke.

The rain was beginning to fall thickly. It swept across the garden, straight on the closed windows, and pattered heavily against the glass.

"Sorry!" repeated Allan. "My dear fellow, you haven't heard the particulars yet. Wait till I explain the thing first."

"You are a bad hand at explanations," said Midwinter, repeating Allan's own words. "Don't place yourself at a disadvantage. Don't explain it."

Allan looked at him, in silent perplexity and surprise.

"You are my friend—my best and dearest friend," Midwinter went on. "I can't bear to let you justify yourself to me as if I was your judge, or as if I doubted you." He looked up again at Allan frankly and kindly as he said those words. "Besides," he resumed, "I think if I look into my

memory, I can anticipate your explanation. We had a moment's talk, before I went away, about some very delicate questions, which you proposed putting to Major Milroy. I remember I warned you; I remember I had my misgivings. Should I be guessing right if I guessed that those questions have been in some way the means of leading you into a false position? If it is true that you have been concerned in Miss Gwilt's leaving her situation, is it also true—is it only doing you justice to believe—that any mischief for which you are responsible, has been mischief innocently done?"

"Yes," said Allan, speaking for the first time, a little constrainedly on his side. "It is only doing me justice to say that." He stopped and began drawing lines absently with his finger on the blurred surface of the window-pane. "You're not like other people, Midwinter," he resumed suddenly, with an effort; "and I should have liked you to have heard the particulars all the same."

"I will hear them if you desire it," returned Midwinter. "But I am satisfied without another word, that you have not willingly been the means of depriving Miss Gwilt of her situation. If that is understood between you and me, I think we need say no more. Besides, I have another question to ask, of much greater importance: a question that has been forced on me by what I saw with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears, last night."

He stopped, recoiling in spite of himself. "Shall we go upstairs first?" he asked abruptly, leading the way to the door, and trying to gain time.

It was useless. Once again, the room which they were both free to leave, the room which one of them had twice tried to leave already, held them as if they were prisoners.

Without answering, without even appearing to have heard Midwinter's proposal to go upstairs, Allan followed him mechanically as far as the opposite side of the window. There he stopped. "Midwinter!" he burst out, in a sudden panic of astonishment and alarm, "there seems to be something strange between us! you're not like yourself. What is it?"

"There *is* something strange between us," Midwinter said. "There is something to be set right which touches you nearly; and it has not been set right yet. You asked me just now where I met with Miss Gwilt. I met with her on my way back here, upon the high road on the farther side of the town. She entreated me to protect her from a man who was following, and frightening her. I saw the scoundrel with my own eyes,

and I should have laid hands on him, if Miss Gwilt herself had not stopped me. She gave a very strange reason for stopping me. She said I didn't know who his employer was. "Later in the evening," he went on, "Miss Gwilt explained herself. She told me two things. She declared that the man whom I had seen following her was a hired spy. I was surprised, but I could not dispute it. She told me next, Allan—what I believe with my whole heart and soul to be a falsehood which has been imposed on her as the truth—she told me that the spy was in *your* employment!"

Allan turned instantly from the window, and looked Midwinter full in the face again. "I *must* explain myself this time," he said resolutely.

The ashy paleness, peculiar to him in moments of strong emotion, began to show itself on Midwinter's cheeks.

"More explanations!" he said, and drew back a step, with his eyes fixed in a sudden terror of inquiry on Allan's face.

"You don't know what I know, Midwinter. You don't know that what I have done has been done with a good reason. And what is more, I have not trusted to myself—I have had good advice."

"Did you hear what I said just now?" asked Midwinter, incredulously; "you can't—surely, you can't have been attending to me?"

"I haven't missed a word," rejoined Allan. "I tell you again, you don't know what I know of Miss Gwilt. She has threatened Miss Milroy. Miss Milroy is in danger while her governess stops in this neighbourhood."

Midwinter dismissed the major's daughter from the conversation with a contemptuous gesture of his hand.

"I don't want to hear about Miss Milroy," he said. "Don't mix up Miss Milroy—— Good God, Allan, am I to understand that the spy set to watch Miss Gwilt was doing his vile work with your approval?"

"Once for all, my dear fellow, will you, or will you not, let me explain?"

"Explain!" cried Midwinter, his eyes aflame, and his hot Creole blood rushing crimson into his face. "Explain the employment of a spy? What! after having driven Miss Gwilt out of her situation, by meddling with her private affairs, you meddle again, by the vilest of all means—the means of a paid spy? You set a watch on the woman whom you yourself told me you loved, only a fortnight since! the woman you were thinking of as your wife!"

Allan controlled himself with admirable patience and admirable consideration for the temper of his friend. "If you persist in refusing to hear me," he said, "I must wait as well as I can till my turn comes."

"Tell me you are a stranger to the employment of that man, and I will hear you willingly."

"Suppose there should be a necessity, that you know nothing about, for employing him?"

"I acknowledge no necessity for the cowardly persecution of a helpless woman."

A momentary flush of irritation—momentary and, no more—passed over Allan's face. "You mightn't think her quite so helpless," he said, "if you knew the truth."

"Are *you* the man to tell me the truth?" retorted the other. "You who have refused to hear her in her own defence! You, who have closed the doors of this house against her!"

Allan still controlled himself, but the effort began at last to be visible.

"I know your temper is a hot one," he said. "But for all that, your violence quite takes me by surprise. I can't account for it, unless——" he hesitated a moment, and then finished the sentence in his usual frank, outspoken way—"unless you are sweet yourself on Miss Gwilt."

Those last words heaped fuel on the fire. They stripped the truth instantly of all concealments and disguises, and laid it bare to view. Allan's instinct had guessed, and the guiding influence stood revealed of Midwinter's interest in Miss Gwilt.

"What right have you to say that?" he asked, with raised voice and threatening eyes.

"I told *you*," said Allan, simply, "when I thought I was sweet on her myself. Come! come! it's a little hard, I think, even if you *are* in love with her, to believe everything she tells you, and not to let me say a word. Is *that* the way you decide between us?"

"Yes, it is!" cried the other, infuriated by Allan's second allusion to Miss Gwilt. "When I am asked to choose between the employer of a spy, and the victim of a spy, I side with the victim!"

He had drawn back along the wall, as Allan advanced, until the bracket which supported the statuette was before instead of behind him. In the madness of his passion, he saw nothing but Allan's face confronting him. In the madness of his

passion, he stretched out his right hand as he answered and shook it threateningly in the air. It struck the forgotten projection of the bracket—and the next instant the statuette lay in fragments on the floor.

The rain drove slanting over flower-bed and lawn, and pattered heavily against the glass; and the two Armadales stood by the window, as the two Shadows had stood in the second Vision of the Dream, with the wreck of the image between them.

Allan stooped over the fragments of the little figure, and lifted them one by one from the floor. "Leave me," he said, without looking up, "or we shall both repent it."

CHAPTER VIII

SHE KNOWS THE TRUTH

I.—*From Mr. Bashwood to Miss Gwilt.*

"Thorpe-Ambrose, July 20th, 1851.

"DEAR MADAM—I received yesterday, by private messenger, your obliging note, in which you direct me to communicate with you, through the post only, as long as there is reason to believe that any visitors who may come to you are likely to be observed. May I be permitted to say, that I look forward with respectful anxiety to the time when I shall again enjoy the only real happiness I have ever experienced—the happiness of personally addressing you?

"In compliance with your desire that I should not allow this day (the Sunday) to pass without privately noticing what went on at the great house, I took the keys, and went this morning to the steward's office. I accounted for my appearance to the servants, by informing them that I had work to do which it was important to complete in the shortest possible time. The same excuse would have done for Mr. Armadale, if we had met, but no such meeting happened.

"Although I was at Thorpe-Ambrose, in what I thought good time, I was too late to see or hear anything myself of a serious quarrel which appeared to have taken place, just before I arrived, between Mr. Armadale and Mr. Midwinter.

"Hearing that Mr. Armadale still remained in his sitting-room, I went into the steward's office (which, as you may re-

member, is on the same side of the house), and left the door ajar, and set the window open, waiting and listening for anything that might happen. Dear madam, there was a time when I might have thought such a position in the house of my employer not a very becoming one. Let me hasten to assure you that this is far from being my feeling now I glory in any position which makes me serviceable to you.

"The state of the weather seemed hopelessly adverse to that renewal of intercourse between Mr. Armadale and Miss Milroy, which you so confidently anticipate, and of which you are so anxious to be made aware. Strangely enough, however, it is actually in consequence of the state of the weather, that I am now in a position to give you the very information you require. Mr. Armadale and Miss Milroy met about an hour since. The circumstances were as follows:—

"Just at the beginning of the thunderstorm, I saw one of the grooms run across from the stables, and heard him tap at his master's window. Mr. Armadale opened the window and asked what was the matter. The groom said he came with a message from the coachman's wife. She had seen from her room over the stables (which looks on to the park), Miss Milroy quite alone, standing for shelter under one of the trees. As that part of the park was at some distance from the major's cottage, she had thought that her master might wish to send and ask the young lady into the house—especially as she had placed herself, with a thunderstorm coming on, in what might turn out to be a very dangerous position.

"The moment Mr. Armadale understood the man's message, he called for the waterproof things and the umbrellas, and ran out himself, instead of leaving it to the servants. In a little time, he and the groom came back with Miss Milroy between them, as well protected as could be from the rain.

"It was impossible for me to get near enough in the conservatory to see what went on in the drawing-room, without the risk of being discovered. But most of the conversation reached me, except when they dropped their voices. This is the substance of what I heard:—

"I gathered that Miss Milroy had been prevailed on, against her will, to take refuge from the thunderstorm in Mr. Armadale's house. She said so at least, and she gave two reasons. The first was, that her father had forbidden all intercourse between the cottage and the great house. Mr. Armadale met this objection by declaring that her father had issued his orders under a total misconception of the truth, and by entreating her not to treat him as cruelly as the major

had treated him. He entered, I suspect, into some explanations at this point, but as he dropped his voice, I am unable to say what they were. His language, when I did hear it, was confused and ungrammatical. It seemed, however, to be quite intelligible enough to persuade Miss Milroy that her father had been acting under a mistaken impression of the circumstances. At least, I infer this; for, when I next heard the conversation, the young lady was driven back to her second objection to being in the house—which was, that Mr. Armadale had behaved very badly to her, and that he richly deserved that she should never speak to him again.

"Trusting that I may have been so happy as to give you satisfaction thus far, and earnestly desirous to deserve the honour of your continued confidence in me, I remain, dear madam,

"Your grateful and devoted servant,

"FELIX BASHWOOD."

2.—From Mr. Bashwood to Miss Gwilt.

"Thorpe-Ambrose, July 21st.

"DEAR MADAM—You will probably receive these lines a few hours after my yesterday's communication reaches you. I posted my first letter last night, and I shall post this before noon to-day.

"I had just arrived at the steward's office this morning, when Mr. Pedgift the elder followed me to the great house to see Mr. Armadale by special appointment. It is needless to say that I at once suspended any little business there was to do, feeling that your interests might possibly be concerned. It is also most gratifying to add that this time circumstances favoured me. I was able to stand under the open window, and to hear the whole interview.

"Mr. Armadale explained himself at once in the plainest terms. He gave orders that the person who had been hired to watch you should be instantly dismissed. On being asked to explain this sudden change of purpose, he did not conceal that it was owing to the effect produced on his mind by what had passed between Mr. Midwinter and himself on the previous day. Mr. Midwinter's language, cruelly unjust as it was, had nevertheless convinced him that no necessity whatever could excuse any proceeding so essentially base in itself as the employment of a spy, and on that conviction he was now determined to act.

"But for your own positive directions to me to conceal nothing that passes here in which your name is concerned, I should really be ashamed to report what Mr. Pedgift said on his side. He has behaved kindly to me, I know. But if he was my own brother, I could never forgive him the tone in which he spoke of you, and the obstinacy with which he tried to make Mr. Armadale change his mind.

"Mr. Armadale (to his credit—I don't deny it, though I don't like him) still said No. He appeared to be getting irritated under Mr. Pedgift's persistence, and he spoke in a somewhat hasty way. 'You persuaded me on the last occasion when we talked about this,' he said, 'to do something that I have been since heartily ashamed of. You won't succeed in persuading me, Mr. Pedgift, a second time.' Those were his words. Mr. Pedgift took him up short; Mr. Pedgift seemed to be nettled on his side.

"'If that is the light in which you see my advice, sir,' he said, 'the less you have of it for the future, the better. Your character and position are publicly involved in this matter between yourself and Miss Gwilt; and you persist, at a most critical moment, in taking a course of your own, which I believe will end badly. After what I have already said and done in this very serious case, I can't consent to go on with it with both my hands tied; and I can't drop it with credit to myself, while I remain publicly known as your solicitor. You leave me no alternative, sir, but to resign the honour of acting as your legal adviser.' 'I am sorry to hear it,' says Mr. Armadale, 'but I have suffered enough already through interfering with Miss Gwilt. I can't and won't stir any further in the matter.' '*You* may not stir any further in it, sir,' says Mr. Pedgift, 'and *I* shall not stir any further in it, for it has ceased to be a question of professional interest to me. But mark my words, Mr. Armadale, you are not at the end of this business yet. Some other person's curiosity may go on from the point where you (and I) have stopped; and some other person's hand may let the broad daylight in yet on Miss Gwilt.'

"I report their language, dear madam, almost word for word, I believe, as I heard it. It produced an indescribable impression on me; it filled me, I hardly know why, with quite a panic of alarm. I don't at all understand it, and I understand still less what happened immediately afterwards.

"Mr. Pedgift's voice, when he said those last words, sounded dreadfully close to me. He must have been speaking at the open window, and he must, I fear, have seen me under it. I

had time, before he left the house, to get out quietly from among the laurels, but not to get back to the office. Accordingly I walked away along the drive towards the lodge, as if I was going on some errand connected with the steward's business.

"I have only to add that I am in a position to be of continued service to you here if you wish it. Mr. Armadale has just been into the office, and has told me briefly that, in Mr. Midwinter's continued absence, I am still to act as steward's deputy till further notice. Believe me, dear madam, anxiously and devotedly yours,

"FELIX BASHWOOD."

3.—*From Allan Armadale to the Rev. Decimus Brock.*

"Thorpe-Ambrose, Tuesday.

"MY DEAR MR. BROCK—I am in sad trouble. Midwinter has quarrelled with me and left me; and my lawyer has quarrelled with me and left me; and (except dear little Miss Milroy, who has forgiven me) all the neighbours have turned their backs on me. There is a good deal about '*me*' in this, but I can't help it. I am very miserable alone in my own house. Do pray come and see me! You are the only old friend I have left, and I do long so to tell you about it. N.B.—On my word of honour as a gentleman, I am not to blame. Yours affectionately,

"ALLAN ARMADALE."

"P.S.—I would come to you (for this place is grown quite hateful to me), but I have a reason for not going too far away from Miss Milroy just at present."

4.—*From Robert Stapleton to Allan Armadale, Esq.*

"Boscombe Rectory, Thursday Morning.

"RESPECTED SIR—I see a letter in your writing, on the table along with the others, which I am sorry to say my master is not well enough to open. He is down with a sort of low fever. The doctor says it has been brought on with worry and anxiety, which master was not strong enough to bear. This seems likely; for I was with him when he went to London last month, and what with his own business, and the business of looking after that person who afterwards gave

us the slip, he was worried and anxious all the time; and for the matter of that, so was I.

"My master was talking of you a day or two since. He seemed unwilling that you should know of his illness, unless he got worse. But I think you ought to know of it. At the same time he is not worse—perhaps a trifle better. The doctor says he must be kept very quiet, and not agitated on any account. So be pleased to take no notice of this—I mean in the way of coming to the rectory. I have the doctor's orders to say it is not needful, and it would only upset my master in the state he is in now.

"I will write again if you wish it. Please accept of my duty, and believe me to remain, sir, your humble servant,

"ROBERT STAPLETON.

"P.S.—The yacht has been rigged and repainted, waiting your orders. She looks beautiful."

5.—*From Mrs. Oldershaw to Miss Gwilt.*

"Diana Street, July 24th.

"MISS GWILT—The post-hour has passed for three mornings following, and has brought me no answer to my letter. Are you purposely bent on insulting me? or have you left Thorpe-Ambrose? In either case, I won't put up with your conduct any longer. The law shall bring you to book, if I can't.

"Your first note-of-hand (for thirty pounds) falls due on Tuesday next, the 29th. If you had behaved with common consideration towards me, I would have let you renew it with pleasure. As things are, I shall have the note presented; and, if it is not paid, I shall instruct my man of business to take the usual course.

"Yours,

"MARIA OLDERSHAW."

6.—*From Miss Gwilt to Mrs. Oldershaw.*

"5 Paradise Place, Thorpe-Ambrose, July 25th.

"MRS OLDERSHAW—The time of your man of business being, no doubt, of some value, I write a line to assist him

when he takes the usual course. He will find me waiting to be arrested in the first-floor apartments, at the above address. In my present situation, and with my present thoughts, the best service you can possibly render me is to lock me up.

"L. G."

7.—*From Mrs. Oldershaw to Miss Gwilt.*

"Diana Street, July 26th.

"MY DARLING LYDIA—The longer I live in this wicked world the more plainly I see that women's own tempers are the worst enemies women have to contend with. What a truly regrettable style of correspondence we have fallen into! What a sad want of self-restraint, my dear, on your side and on mine!

"Let me, as the older in years, be the first to make the needful excuses, the first to blush for my own want of self-control. Your cruel neglect, Lydia, stung me into writing as I did. I am so sensitive to ill-treatment, when it is inflicted on me by a person whom I love and admire—and, though turned sixty, I am still (unfortunately for myself) so young at heart. Accept my apologies for having made use of my pen when I ought to have been content to take refuge in my pocket-handkerchief. Forgive your attached Maria for being still young at heart!

"But oh, my dear—though I own I threatened you—how hard of you to take me at my word! How cruel of you, if your debt had been ten times what it is, to suppose me capable (whatever I might say) of the odious inhumanity of arresting my bosom friend! Heavens! have I deserved to be taken at my word in this unmercifully exact way, after the years of tender intimacy that have united us?

"I am wandering a little; I am losing myself in serious thought, like that sweet character in Shakespeare who was 'fancy free'. One last word, dearest, to say that my longing for an answer to this proceeds entirely from my wish to hear from you again in your old friendly tone, and is quite unconnected with any curiosity to know what you are doing at Thorpe-Ambrose—except such curiosity as you yourself might approve. Need I add that I beg you as a favour to *me*, to renew, on the customary terms? I refer to the little bill due on Tuesday next, and I venture to suggest that day six weeks.

"Yours, with a truly motherly feeling,

"MARIA OLDERSHAW."

8.—*From Miss Gwilt to Mrs. Oldershaw.*

"Paradise Place, July 27th.

"I HAVE just got your last letter. The brazen impudence of it has roused me. I am to be treated like a child, am I?—to be threatened first, and then, if threatening fails, to be coaxed afterwards? You *shall* coax me; you shall know, my motherly friend, the sort of child you have to deal with.

"Where did my last letter end? I don't remember, and don't care. Make it out as you can—I am not going back any further than this day week. That is to say, Sunday last.

"There was a thunderstorm in the morning. It began to clear off towards noon. I didn't go out—I waited to see Midwinter or to hear from him. (Are you surprised at my not writing 'Mr.' before his name? We have got so familiar, my dear, that 'Mr.' would be quite out of place.) He had left me the evening before, under very interesting circumstances. I had told him that his friend, Armadale, was persecuting me by means of a hired spy. He had declined to believe it, and had gone straight to Thorpe-Ambrose to clear the thing up. I let him kiss my hand before he went. He promised to come back the next day (the Sunday). I felt I had secured my influence over him; and I believed he would keep his word.

"Well, the thunder passed away as I told you. The weather cleared up; the people walked out in their best clothes; the dinners came in from the bakers; I sat dreaming at my wretched little hired piano, nicely dressed and looking my best—and still no Midwinter appeared. It was late in the afternoon, and I was beginning to feel offended, when a letter was brought to me. It had been left by a strange messenger who went away again immediately. I looked at the letter. Midwinter at last—in writing, instead of in person. I began to feel more offended than ever—for, as I told you, I thought I had used my influence over him to better purpose.

"The letter, when I read it, set my mind off in a new direction. It surprised, it puzzled, it interested me. I thought, and thought of him, all the rest of the day.

"He began by asking my pardon for having doubted what I told him. Mr. Armadale's own lips had confirmed me. They had quarrelled (as I had anticipated they would)—and he, and the man who had once been his dearest friend on earth, had parted for ever. So far, I was not surprised. I was amused by his telling me in his extravagant way that he and his friend were parted for ever; and I rather wondered

what he would think when I carried out my plan, and found my way into the great house on pretence of reconciling them.

"But the second part of the letter set me thinking. Here it is, in his own words:

"'It is only by struggling against myself (and no language can say how hard the struggle has been) that I have decided on writing, instead of speaking to you. A merciless necessity claims my future life. I must leave Thorpe-Ambrose, I must leave England, without hesitating, without stopping to look back. There are reasons—terrible reasons, which I have madly trifled with—for my never letting Mr. Armadale set eyes on me, or hear of me again, after what has happened between us. And yet, feeling this, seeing it in my mind as plainly as I see the sky above my head, there is a weakness in me that still shrinks from the one imperative sacrifice of never seeing you again. I am fighting with it as a man fights with the strength of his despair. I have been near enough, not an hour since, to see the house where you live, and have forced myself away again out of sight of it. Can I force myself away farther still, now that my letter is written—now, when the useless confession escapes me, and I own to loving you with the first love I have ever known, with the last love I shall ever feel? Let the coming time answer the question; I dare not write of it or think of it more.'

"Those were the last words. In that strange way the letter ended.

'You don't know what a pleasure it is to me to give you all these little particulars. Count up—my bosom friend, my second mother—count up the money you have advanced on the chance of my becoming Mrs. Armadale, and then think of my feeling this breathless interest in another man. Oh, Mrs. Oldershaw, how intensely I enjoy the luxury of irritating you!

"The day got on towards evening. I rang again, and sent down to borrow a railway time-table. What trains were there to take him away on Sunday? The national respect for the Sabbath stood my friend. There was only one train, which had started hours before he wrote to me. I went and consulted my glass. It paid me the compliment of contradicting the divination by cherry-stones. My glass said, 'Get behind the window-curtain; he won't pass the long lonely evening without coming back again to look at the house.' I got behind the window-curtain, and waited with his letter in my hand.

"The dismal Sunday light faded, and the dismal Sunday quietness in the street grew quieter still. The dusk came, and I heard a step coming with it in the silence. My heart

gave a little jump—only think of my having any heart left! I said to myself, 'Midwinter!' And Midwinter it was.

"When he came in sight he was walking slowly, stopping and hesitating at every two or three steps. My ugly little drawing-room window seemed to be beckoning him on in spite of himself. After waiting till I saw him come to a stand-still, a little aside from the house, but still within view of my irresistible window, I put on my things and slipped out by the back way into the garden. The landlord and his family were at supper, and nobody saw me. I opened the door in the wall, and got round by the lane into the street. At that awkward moment I suddenly remembered, what I had forgotten before, the spy set to watch me, who was, no doubt, waiting somewhere in sight of the house.

"Finding an old letter of yours in my pocket, I drew back into the lane, and wrote on the blank leaf, with the little pencil that hangs at my watch-chain:—'I must and will speak to you. It is impossible to-night, but be in the street to-morrow at this time, and leave me afterwards for ever, if you like. When you have read this, overtake me, and say as you pass, without stopping or looking round, "Yes, I promise."'

"I folded up the paper, and came on him suddenly from behind. As he started and turned round, I put the note into his hand, pressed his hand, and passed on. Before I had taken ten steps I heard him behind me. I can't say he didn't look round—I saw his big black eyes, bright and glittering in the dusk, devour me from head to foot in a moment; but otherwise he did what I told him. 'I can deny you nothing,' he whispered; 'I promise.' He went on and left me. I couldn't help thinking at the time how that brute and booby Armadale would have spoilt everything in the same situation.

"I tried hard all night to think of a way of making our interview of the next evening safe from discovery, and tried in vain. Even as early as this, I began to feel as if Midwinter's letter had, in some unaccountable manner, stupefied me.

"Monday morning made matters worse. News came from my faithful ally, Mr. Bashwood, that Miss Milroy and Armadale had met and become friends again. You may fancy the state I was in! An hour or two later there came more news from Mr. Bashwood—good news this time. The mischievous idiot at Thorpe-Ambrose had shown sense enough at last to be ashamed of himself. He had decided on withdrawing the spy that very day, and he and his lawyer had quarrelled in consequence.

"So here was the obstacle which I was too stupid to remove for myself, obligingly removed for me! No more need to fret about the coming interview with Midwinter—and plenty of time to consider my next proceedings, now that Miss Milroy and her precious swain had come together again. Would you believe it, the letter or the man himself (I don't know which), had taken such a hold on me that, though I tried and tried, I could think of nothing else—and this, when I had every reason to fear that Miss Milroy was in a fair way of changing her name to Armadale, and when I knew that my heavy debt of obligation to her was not paid yet? Was there ever such perversity? I can't account for it—can you?

"The dusk of the evening came at last. I looked out of the window—and there he was!

"I joined him at once; the people of the house, as before, being too much absorbed in their eating and drinking to notice anything else. 'We mustn't be seen together here,' I whispered. 'I must go on first, and you must follow me.'

"He said nothing in the way of reply. What was going on in his mind I can't pretend to guess—but, after coming to his appointment, he actually hung back as if he was half inclined to go away again.

"'You look as if you were afraid of me,' I said.

"'I *am* afraid of you,' he answered—'of you, and of myself.'

"It was not encouraging; it was not complimentary. But I was in such a frenzy of curiosity by this time, that if he had been ruder still, I should have taken no notice of it. I led the way a few steps towards the new buildings, and stopped and looked round after him.

"'Must I ask it of you as a favour,' I said, 'after your giving me your promise, and after such a letter as you have written to me?'

"Something suddenly changed him; he was at my side in an instant. 'I beg your pardon, Miss Gwilt; lead the way where you please.' He dropped back a little after that answer, and I heard him say to himself, 'What *is* to be, *will* be. What have I to do with it, and what has she?'

"It could hardly have been the words, for I didn't understand them—it must have been the tone he spoke in, I suppose, that made me feel a momentary tremor. I was half-inclined, without the ghost of a reason for it, to wish him good-night, and go in again. Not much like *me*, you will say. Not much, indeed! It didn't last a moment. Your darling Lydia soon came to her senses again.

"I led the way towards the unfinished cottages, and the country beyond. It would have been much more to my taste to have had him into the house, and have talked to him in the light of the candles. But I had risked it once already; and in this scandal-mongering place, and in my critical position, I was afraid to risk it again. The garden was not to be thought of either—for the landlord smokes his pipe there after his supper. There was no alternative but to take him away from the town.

"From time to time, I looked back as I went on. There he was, always at the same distance, dim and ghostlike in the dusk, silently following me.

"I must leave off for a little while. The church bells have broken out, and the jangling of them drives me mad. In these days, when we have all got watches or clocks, why are bells wanted to remind us when the service begins? We don't require to be rung into the theatre. How excessively discreditable to the clergy to be obliged to ring us into the church!

"They have rung the congregation in at last—and I can take up my pen, and go on again.

"I was a little in doubt where to lead him to. The high road was on one side of me—but, empty as it looked, somebody might be passing when we least expected it. The other way was through the coppice. I led him through the coppice.

"At the outskirts of the trees, on the other side, there was a dip in the ground, with some felled timber lying in it, and a little pool beyond, still and white and shining in the twilight. The long grazing-grounds rose over the farther shore, with the mist thickening on them, and a dim black line far away of cattle in slow procession going home. There wasn't a living creature near; there wasn't a sound to be heard. I sat down on one of the felled trees, and looked back for him. 'Come,' I said softly, 'come and sit by me here.'

"He came—in the strangest silent way, like a man walking in his sleep—he came and sat down by me. Either the night was very close, or I was by this time literally in a fever—I couldn't bear my bonnet on; I couldn't bear my gloves. The want to look at him, and see what his singular silence meant, and the impossibility of doing it in the darkening light, irritated my nerves till I thought I should have screamed. I took his hand, to try if that would help me. It was burning hot; and it closed instantly on mine—you know how. Silence, after *that*, was not to be thought of. The one safe way was to begin talking to him at once.

"'Don't despise me,' I said. 'I am obliged to bring you to this lonely place; I should lose my character if we were seen together.'

"I waited a little. His hand warned me once more not to let the silence continue. I determined to *make* him speak to me this time.

"'You have interested me, and frightened me,' I went on. 'You have written me a very strange letter. I must know what it means.'

"'It is too late to ask. *You* have taken the way, and *I* have taken the way, from which there is no turning back.' He made that strange answer in a tone that was quite new to me —a tone that made me even more uneasy than his silence had made me the moment before. 'Too late,' he repeated, 'too late! There is only one question to ask me now.'

"'What is it?'

"As I said the words, a sudden trembling passed from his hand to mine, and told me instantly that I had better have held my tongue. Before I could move, before I could think, he had me in his arms. 'Ask me if I love you,' he whispered. At the same moment his head sank on my bosom; and some unutterable torture that was in him burst its way out, as it does with *us*, in a passion of sobs and tears.

"'I won't reproach you,' I said gently; 'I won't say this is a cruel advantage to take of me, in such a position as mine. You are dreadfully agitated—I will let you wait a little, and compose yourself.'

"Having got as far as that, I stopped to consider how I should put the questions to him that I was burning to ask. But I was too confused, I suppose, or perhaps too impatient to consider. I let out what was uppermost in my mind, in the words that came first.

"'I don't believe you love me,' I said. 'You write strange things to me; you frighten me with mysteries. What did you mean by saying in your letter that it would be fatal to Mr. Armadale if you came back to me? What danger can there be to Mr. Armadale—?'

"Before I could finish the question, he suddenly lifted his head and unclasped his arms. I had apparently touched some painful subject which recalled him to himself. Instead of my shrinking from *him*, it was he who shrank from *me*. I felt offended with him; why, I don't know—but offended I was; and I thanked him with my bitterest emphasis, for remembering what was due to me, *at last*!

"'Do you believe in Dreams?' he burst out in the most strangely abrupt manner, without taking the slightest notice of what I had said to him. 'Tell me,' he went on, without allowing me time to answer, 'were you, or was any relation of yours, ever connected with Allan Armadale's father or mother? Were you, or was anybody belonging to you, ever in the island of Madeira?'

"Conceive my astonishment, if you can. I turned cold. In an instant I turned cold all over. He was plainly in the secret of what had happened when I was in Mrs. Armadale's service in Madeira—in all probability before he was born! That was startling enough of itself. And he had evidently some reason of his own for trying to connect *me* with those events—which was more startling still.

"'No,' I said, as soon as I could trust myself to speak. 'I know nothing of his father or mother.'

"'And nothing of the island of Madeira?'

"'Nothing of the island of Madeira?'

"He turned his head away and began talking to himself.

"'Strange!' he said. 'As certainly as I was in the Shadow's place at the window, *she* was in the Shadow's place at the pool!'

"Under other circumstances, his extraordinary behaviour might have alarmed me. But after his question about Madeira, there was some greater fear in me which kept all common alarm at a distance. I don't think I ever determined on anything in my life as I determined on finding out how he had got his information, and who he really was. It was quite plain to me that I had roused some hidden feeling in him by my question about Armadale, which was as strong in its way as his feeling for *me*. What had become of my influence over him?

"I couldn't imagine what had become of it; but I could and did set to work to make him feel it again.

"'Don't treat me cruelly,' I said; 'I didn't treat *you* cruelly just now. Oh, Mr. Midwinter, it's so lonely, it's so dark—don't frighten me?'

"'Frighten you!' He was close to me again in a moment. 'Frighten you!' He repeated the word with as much astonishment as if I had woke him from a dream, and charged him with something that he had said in his sleep.

"His arm stole round me again; and I felt the quick beat of his heart get quicker and quicker. 'If you only knew!'

he whispered back; 'if you only knew—" He could say no more, I felt his face bending towards mine, and dropped my head lower, and stopped him in the very act of kissing me. 'No,' I said; 'I am only a woman who has taken your fancy. You are treating me as if I was your promised wife.'

"'*Be* my promised wife!' he whispered eagerly, and tried to raise my head. I kept it down. The horror of those old remembrances that you know of, came back, and made me tremble a little when he asked me to be his wife. I don't think I was actually faint; but something like faintness made me close my eyes. The moment I shut them, the darkness seemed to open as if lightning had split it: and the ghosts of *those other men* rose in the horrid gap, and looked at me.

"'Speak to me!' he whispered, tenderly. 'My darling, my angel, speak to me!'

"His voice helped me to recover myself. I had just sense enough left to remember that the time was passing, and that I had not put my question to him yet about his name.

"'Suppose I felt for you as you feel for me?' I said. 'Suppose I loved you dearly enough to trust you with the happiness of all my life to come?'

"I paused a moment to get my breath. It was unbearably still and close—the air seemed to have died when the night came.

"'Would you be marrying me honourably,' I went on, 'if you married me in your present name?'

"His arm dropped from my waist, and I felt him give one great start. After that he sat by me, still, and cold, and silent, as if my question had struck him dumb. I put my arm round his neck, and lifted my head again on his shoulder. Whatever the spell was I had laid on him, my coming closer in that way seemed to break it.

"'Who told you?'—he stopped. 'No,' he went on, nobody can have told you. What made you suspect——?' He stopped again.

"'Nobody told me,' I said; 'and I don't know what made me suspect. Women have strange fancies sometimes. Is Midwinter really your name?'

"'I can't deceive you,' he answered, after another interval of silence, 'Midwinter is *not* really my name.'

"I nestled a little closer to him.

"'What *is* your name?' I asked.

"He hesitated.

"I lifted my face till my cheek just touched his. I persisted, with my lips close at his ear,—

"'What, no confidence in me even yet! No confidence in the woman who has almost confessed she loves you—who has almost consented to be your wife!'

"He turned his face to mine. For the second time he tried to kiss me, and for the second time I stopped him.

"'If I tell you my name,' he said, 'I must tell you more.'

"I let my cheek touch his cheek again.

"'Why not?' I said. 'How can I love a man—much less marry him—if he keeps himself a stranger to me?'

"There was no answering that, as I thought. But he did answer it.

"'It is a dreadful story,' he said. 'It may darken all your life, if you know it, as it has darkened mine.'

"I put my other arm round him, and persisted. 'Tell it me; I'm not afraid; tell it me.'

"He began to yield to my other arm.

"'Will you keep it a sacred secret?' he said, 'Never to be breathed—never to be known but to you and me?'

"I promised him it should be a secret. I waited in a perfect frenzy of expectation. Twice he tried to begin, and twice his courage failed him.

"'I can't!' he broke out in a wild helpless way. 'I can't tell it!'

"My curiosity, or more likely my temper, got beyond all control. He had irritated me till I was reckless what I said or what I did. I suddenly clasped him close, and pressed my lips to his. 'I love you!' I whispered in a kiss. '*Now* will you tell me?'

"For the moment he was speechless. I don't know whether I did it purposely to drive him wild. I don't know whether I did it involuntarily in a burst of rage. Nothing is certain but that I interpreted his silence the wrong way. I pushed him back from me in a fury the instant after I had kissed him. 'I hate you!' I said. 'You have maddened me into forgetting myself. Leave me! I don't care for the darkness. Leave me instantly, and never see me again!'

"He caught me by the hand and stopped me. He spoke in a new voice—he suddenly *commanded*, as only men can.

"'Sit down,' he said. 'You have given me back my courage—you shall know who I am.'

"In the silence and the darkness all round us, I obeyed him, and sat down.

"In the silence and the darkness all round us, he took me in his arms again, and told me who he was.

"Shall I trust you with his story? Shall I tell you his real name? Shall I show you, as I threatened, the thoughts that have grown out of my interview with him, and out of all that has happened to me since that time?

"Or shall I keep his secret as I promised? and keep my own secret too, by bringing this weary long letter to an end at the very moment when you are burning to hear more!

"Yes! I shall keep his secret!"

CHAPTER IX

MISS GWILT'S DIARY

July 21, *Monday night, eleven o'clock.*—Allan the Fair doesn't know he has a namesake. And Allan the Dark has kept the secret from everybody but the Somersetshire clergyman (whose discretion he can depend on), and myself. I have made up my mind. I shall marry Midwinter in his real name, after leaving Thorpe-Ambrose with Armadale. How I shall contrive to do this I do not know as yet.

Midwinter is going abroad shortly, as foreign correspondent to some newspaper, and I shall get Armadale to follow us. It should be easy to bring about his death. Then I can return to this place as his widow, with my marriage lines to help me. And who will believe Midwinter's wild tale?

And so I have three things to do: leave Thorpe-Ambrose with Armadale so that people will remember us. Marry Midwinter. Bring about the death of Armadale. I have a good ally in Bashwood. He acts as my spy, keeps me informed of the movements of Armadale and Miss Milroy.

CHAPTER X

LOVE AND LAW

On the morning of Monday, the twenty-eighth of July, Miss Gwilt—on the watch for Allan and Neelie—reached her customary post of observation in the park, by the usual round-about way.

She was a little surprised to find Neelie alone at the place of meeting. She was more seriously astonished, when the tardy Allan made his appearance ten minutes later, to see him mounting the side of the dell, with a large volume under his arm, and to hear him say, as an apology for being late, that "he had muddled away his time in hunting for the Books; and that he had only found one, after all, which seemed in the least likely to repay either Neelie or himself for the trouble of looking into it."

If Miss Gwilt had waited long enough in the park, on the previous Saturday, to hear the lovers' parting words on that occasion, she would have been at no loss to explain the mystery of the volume under Allan's arm, and she would have understood the apology which he now offered for being late as readily as Neelie herself.

There is a certain exceptional occasion in life—the occasion of marriage—on which even girls in their teens sometimes become capable (more or less hysterically) of looking at consequences. At the farewell moment of the interview on Saturday, Neelie's mind had suddenly precipitated itself into the future; and she had utterly confounded Allan by inquiring whether the contemplated elopement was an offence punishable by the Law? Her memory satisfied her that she had certainly read somewhere, at some former period, in some book or other (possibly a novel), of an elopement with a dreadful end—of a bride dragged home in hysterics—and of a bridegroom sentenced to languish in prison, with all his beautiful hair cut off, by Act of Parliament, close to his head. Supposing she could bring herself to consent to the elopement at all—which she positively declined to promise—she must first insist on discovering whether there was any fear of the police being concerned in her marriage as well as the parson and the clerk. Allan being a man, ought to know; and to Allan she looked for information—with this

preliminary assurance to assist him in laying down the law, that she would die of a broken heart a thousand times over, rather than be the innocent means of sending him to languish in prison, and of cutting his hair off, by Act of Parliament, close to his head. "It's no laughing matter," said Neelie resolutely, in conclusion; "I decline even to think of our marriage, till my mind is made easy first on the subject of the Law."

"But I don't know anything about the law, not even as much as you do," said Allan. "Hang the law! I don't mind my head being cropped. Let's risk it."

"Risk it?" repeated Neelie, indignantly. "Have you no consideration for *me*? I won't risk it! Where there's a will, there's a way. We must find out the law for ourselves."

"With all my heart," said Allan. "How?"

"Out of books, to be sure! There must be quantities of information in that enormous library of yours at the great house. If you really love me, you won't mind going over the backs of a few thousand books, for my sake!"

"I'll go over the backs of ten thousand!" cried Allan, warmly. "Would you mind telling me what I'm to look for?"

"For 'Law,' to be sure! When it says 'Law' on the back, open it, and look inside for Marriage—read every word of it—and then come here and explain it to me. What? you don't think your head is to be trusted to do such a simple thing as that?"

"I'm certain it isn't," said Allan. "Can't you help me?"

"Of course I can, if you can't manage without me! Law may be hard, but it can't be harder than music; and I must, and will, satisfy my mind. Bring me all the books you can find, on Monday morning—in a wheelbarrow, if there are a good many of them, and if you can't manage it in any other way."

The result of this conversation was Allan's appearance in the park, with a volume of Blackstone's Commentaries under his arm. Here again, in this, as in all other human instances, the widely discordant elements of the grotesque and the terrible were forced together by that subtle law of contrast which is one of the laws of mortal life. Amid all the thickening complications now impending over their heads—with the shadow of meditated murder stealing towards one of them already, from the lurking-place that hid Miss Gwilt—the two

sat down, unconscious of the future, with the book between them; and applied themselves to the study of the law of marriage, with a grave resolution to understand it, which, in two such students, was nothing less than a burlesque in itself!

"Find the place," said Neelie, as soon as they were comfortably established. "We must manage this, by what they call a division of labour. You shall read—and I'll take notes."

She produced forthwith a smart little pocket-book and pencil, and opened the book in the middle, where there was a blank page on the right hand and the left. At the top of the right-hand page, she wrote the word *Good*. At the top of the left-hand page, she wrote the word *Bad*. "'Good' means where the law is on our side," she explained; "and 'Bad' means where the law is against us. We will have 'Good' and 'Bad' opposite each other, all down the two pages; and when we get to the bottom, we'll add them up, and act accordingly. They say girls have no heads for business. Haven't they! Don't look at me—look at Blackstone, and begin."

"Would you mind giving me a kiss first?" asked Allan.

"I should mind it very much. In our serious situation, when we have both got to exert our intellects, I wonder you can ask for such a thing!"

"That's why I asked for it," said the unblushing Allan. "I feel as if it would clear your head."

"Oh, if it would clear your head, that's quite another thing! I must clear your head of course, at any sacrifice. Only one, mind," she whispered coquettishly; "and pray be careful of Blackstone, or you'll lose the place."

There was a pause in the conversation. Blackstone and the pocket-book both rolled on the ground together.

"If this happens again," said Neelie, picking up the pocket-book, with her eyes and her complexion at their brightest and best, "I shall sit with my back to you for the rest of the morning. *Will* you go on?"

Allan found his place for the second time, and fell headlong into the bottomless abyss of the English Law.

"Page two-hundred-and-eighty," he began. "Law of husband and wife. Here's a bit I don't understand, to begin with:—'It may be observed generally, that the law considers marriage in the light of a Contract.' What does that mean?

I thought a contract was the sort of thing a builder signs, when he promises to have the workmen out of the house in a given time, and when the time comes (as my poor mother used to say) the workmen never go."

"It there nothing about Love?" asked Neelie. "Look a little lower down."

"Not a word. He sticks to his confounded 'Contract,' all the way through."

"Then he's a brute! Go on to something else that's more in our way."

"Here's a bit that's more in our way:—'Incapacities. If any persons under legal incapacities come together, it is a meretricious, and not a matrimonial union.' (Blackstone's a good one at long words, isn't he? I wonder what he means by meretricious?) 'The first of these legal disabilities is a prior marriage, and having another husband or wife living—'"

"Stop!" said Neelie. "I must make a note of that." She gravely made her first entry on the page headed "Good," as follows:—"I have no husband, and Allan has no wife. We are both entirely unmarried at the present time."

"All right, so far," remarked Allan, looking over her shoulder.

"Go on," said Neelie. "What next?"

"'The next disability,'" proceeded Allan, "'is want of age. The age for consent to matrimony is, fourteen in males, and twelve in females.' Come!" cried Allan cheerfully, "Blackstone begins early enough at any rate!"

Neelie was too business-like to make any other remark, on her side, than the necessary remark in the pocket-book. She made another entry under the head of "Good":—"I am old enough to consent, and so is Allan too. Go on," resumed Neelie, looking over the reader's shoulder. "Never mind all that prosing of Blackstone's, about the husband being of years of discretion, and the wife under twelve. Abominable wretch! the wife under twelve! Skip to the third incapacity, if there is one."

"The third incapacity," Allan went on, "is want of reason."

Neelie immediately made a third entry on the side of "Good": "Allan and I are both perfectly reasonable—skip to the next page."

Allan skipped. "A fourth incapacity is in respect of proximity of relationship."

A fourth entry followed instantly on the cheering side of

the pocket-book:—"He loves me and I love him—without our being in the slightest degree related to each other. Any more?" asked Neelie, tapping her chin impatiently with the end of the pencil.

"Plenty more," rejoined Allan; "all in hieroglyphics. Look here: 'Marriage Acts, 4 Geo. iv. c. 76, and 6 and 7 Will. iv. c. 85 (*q*).' Blackstone's intellect seems to be wandering here. Shall we take another skip and see if he picks himself up again on the next page?"

"Wait a little," said Neelie, "what's that I see in the middle?" She read for a minute in silence, over Allan's shoulder, and suddenly clasped her hands in despair. "I knew I was right!" she exclaimed. "Oh, heavens, here it is!"

"Where?" asked Allan. "I see nothing about languishing in prison, and cropping a fellow's hair close to his head, unless it's in the hieroglyphics. Is '4 Geo. iv.' short for 'Lock him up?' and does 'c. 85 (*q*)' mean, 'Send for the hair-cutter?'"

"Pray be serious," remonstrated Neelie. "We are both sitting on a volcano. There!" she said, pointing to the place. "Read it! If anything can bring you to a proper sense of our situation, *that* will."

Allan cleared his throat, and Neelie held the point of her pencil ready on the depressing side of the account—otherwise the "Bad" page of the pocket-book.

"'And as it is the policy of our law,' Allan began, 'to prevent the marriage of persons under the age of twenty-one, without the consent of parents and guardians'" (Neelie made her first entry on the side of "Bad." "I am only seventeen next birthday, and circumstances forbid me to confide my attachment to papa")—"'it is provided that in the case of the publication of banns of a person under twenty-one, not being a widower or widow, who are deemed emancipated'" —(Neelie made another entry on the depressing side. "Allan is not a widower, and I am not a widow; consequently, we are neither of us emancipated,")—"'if the parent or guardian openly signifies his dissent at the time the banns are published'"—("which papa would be certain to do")—"'such publication would be void.' I'll take breath here, if you'll allow me," said Allan. "Blackstone might put it in shorter sentences, I think, if he can't put it in fewer words. Cheer up, Neelie! there must be other ways of marrying, besides this roundabout way, that ends in a Publication and a Void. Infernal gibberish! I could write better English myself."

"We are not at the end of it yet," said Neelie. "The Void is nothing to what is to come."

"Whatever it is," rejoined Allan, "we'll treat it like a dose of physic—we'll take it at once, and be done with it." He went on reading:—"'And no licence to marry without banns shall be granted, unless oath shall be first made by one of the parties that he or she believes that there is no impediment of kindred or alliance'—well, I can take my oath of that with a safe conscience! What next? 'And one of the said parties must, for the space of fifteen days immediately preceding such licence, have had his or her usual place of abode within the parish or chapelry within which such marriage is to be solemnised!' Chapelry! I'd live fifteen days in a dog-kennel with the greatest pleasure. I say, Neelie, all this seems like plain sailing enough. What are you shaking your head about? Go on, and I shall see? Oh, all right; I'll go on. Here we are—'And where one of the said parties, not being a widower or widow, shall be under the age of twenty-one years, oath must first be made that the consent of the person or persons whose consent is required, has been obtained, or that there is no person having authority to give such consent. The consent required by this Act is that of the father—'" At those last formidable words Allan came to a full stop. "The consent of the father," he repeated, with all needful seriousness of look and manner. "I couldn't exactly swear to that, could I?"

Neelie answered in expressive silence. She handed him the pocket-book, with the final entry completed on the side of "Bad," in these terms—"Our marriage is impossible, unless Allan commits perjury."

The lovers looked at each other across the insuperable obstacle of Blackstone, in speechless dismay.

"Shut up the book," said Neelie, resignedly. "I have no doubt we should find the police, and the prison, and the hair-cutting—all punishments for perjury, exactly as I told you!—if we looked at the next page. But we needn't trouble ourselves to look; we have found out quite enough already. It's all over with us. I must go to school on Saturday, and you must manage to forget me as soon as you can. Perhaps we may meet in after-life, and you may be a widower and I may be a widow, and the cruel law may consider us emancipated, when it's too late to be of the slightest use. By that time no doubt I shall be old and ugly, and you will naturally have ceased to care about me, and it will all end in the grave, and the sooner the better. Good-bye," concluded Neelie, rising

mournfully, with tears in her eyes. "It's only prolonging our misery to stop here, unless—unless you have anything to propose?"

"I've got something to propose," cried the headlong Allan. "It's an entirely new idea. Would you mind trying the blacksmith at Gretna Green?"

"No earthly consideration," answered Neelie indignantly, "would induce me to be married by a blacksmith!"

"Don't be offended," pleaded Allan; "I meant it for the best. Lots of people in our situation have tried the blacksmith, and found him quite as good as a clergyman, and a most amiable man, I believe, into the bargain. Never mind! We must try another string to our bow."

"We haven't got another to try," said Neelie.

"Take my word for it," persisted Allan stoutly, "there must be ways and means of circumventing Blackstone (without perjury), if we only knew of them. It's a matter of law, and we must consult somebody in the profession. I daresay it's a risk. But nothing venture, nothing have. What do you say to young Pedgift? He's a thorough good fellow. I'm sure we could trust young Pedgift to keep our secret."

"Not for worlds!" exclaimed Neelie. "You may be willing to trust your secrets to the vulgar little wretch, I won't have him trusted with mine. I hate him. No!" she concluded with a mounting colour and a peremptory stamp of her foot on the grass. "I positively forbid you to take any of the Thorpe-Ambrose people into your confidence. They would instantly suspect *me*, and it would be all over the place in a moment. My attachment may be an unhappy one," remarked Neelie, with her handkerchief to her eyes, "and papa may nip it in the bud, but I won't have it profaned by the town gossip!"

"Hush! hush!" said Allan. "I won't say a word at Thorpe-Ambrose, I won't indeed!" He paused and considered for a moment. "There's another way!" he burst out, brightening up on the instant. "We've got the whole week before us. I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll go to London!"

There was a sudden rustling—heard neither by one nor the other—among the trees behind them that screened Miss Gwilt. One more of the difficulties in her way (the difficulty of getting Allan to London) now promised to be removed by an act of Allan's own will.

"To London?" repeated Neelie, looking up in astonishment.

"To London!" reiterated Allan. "That's far enough away from Thorpe-Ambrose, surely? Wait a minute, and don't forget that this is a question of law. Very well, I know some lawyers in London who managed all my business for me when I first came in for this property; they are just the men to consult. And if they decline to be mixed up in it, there's their head clerk, who is one of the best fellows I ever met with in my life. I asked him to go yachting with me, I remember; and though he couldn't go, he said he felt the obligation all the same. That's the man to help us. Blackstone's a mere infant to him. Don't say it's absurd; don't say it's exactly like *me*. Do pray hear me out. I won't breathe your name or your father's. I'll describe you as 'a young lady to whom I am devotedly attached.' And if my friend the clerk asks where you live, I'll say the north of Scotland, or the west of Ireland, or the Channel Islands, or anywhere else you like. My friend the clerk is a total stranger to Thorpe-Ambrose and everybody in it (which is one recommendation); and in five minutes' time, he'd put me up to what to do (which is another). If you only knew him! He's one of those extraordinary men who appear once or twice in a century—the sort of man who won't allow you to make a mistake if you try. All I have got to say to him (putting it short) is, 'My dear fellow, I want to be privately married, without perjury.' All he has got to say to me (putting it short) is, 'You must do So-and-So, and So-and-So; and you must be careful to avoid This, That, and The Other. I have nothing in the world to do but to follow his directions; and you have nothing in the world to do but what the bride always does when the bridegroom is ready and willing!" His arm stole round Neelie's waist, and his lips pointed the moral of the last sentence with that inarticulate eloquence which is so uniformly successful in persuading a woman against her will.

All Neelie's meditated objections dwindled, in spite of her, to one feeble little question. "Suppose I allow you to go, Allan?" she whispered, toying nervously with the stud in the bosom of his shirt. "Shall you be very long away?"

"I'll be off to-day," said Allan, "by the eleven o'clock train. And I'll be back to-morrow, if I and my friend the clerk can settle it all in time. If not, by Wednesday at latest."

"You'll write to me every day?" pleaded Neelie, clinging a little closer to him. "I shall sink under the suspense, if you don't promise to write to me every day."

Allan promised to write twice a day, if she liked—letter-writing, which was such an effort to other men, was no effort to *him*!

"And mind, whatever those people may say to you in London," proceeded Neelie, "I insist on your coming back for me. I positively decline to run away, unless you promise to fetch me."

Allan promised for the second time, on his sacred word of honour, and at the full compass of his voice. But Neelie was not satisfied even yet. She reverted to first principles, and insisted on knowing whether Allan was quite sure he loved her. Allan called heaven to witness how sure he was, and got another question directly for his pains. Could he solemnly declare that he would never regret taking Neelie away from home? Allan called heaven to witness again, louder than ever. All to no purpose! The ravenous female appetite for tender protestations still hungered for more. "I know what will happen one of these days," persisted Neelie. "You will see some other girl who is prettier than I am; and you will wish you had married her instead of Me!"

As Allan opened his lips for a final outburst of asseveration, the stable-clock at the great house was faintly audible in the distance, striking the hour. Neelie started guiltily. It was breakfast-time at the cottage—in other words, time to take leave. At the last moment her heart went back to her father; and her head sank on Allan's bosom as she tried to say, Good-bye. "Papa has always been so kind to me, Allan," she whispered, holding him back tremulously when he turned to leave her. "It seems so guilty and so heartless to go away from him and be married in secret. Oh, do, do think before you really go to London; is there no way of making him a little kinder and juster to *you*?" The question was useless; the major's resolutely unfavourable reception of Allan's letter rose in Neelie's memory, and answered her as the words passed her lips. With a girl's impulsiveness she pushed Allan away before he could speak, and signed to him impatiently to go. The conflict of contending emotions, which she had mastered thus far, burst its way outward in spite of her after he had waved his hand for the last time, and had disappeared in the depths of the dell. When she turned from the place, on her side, her long-restrained tears fell freely at last, and made the lonely way back to the cottage the dimmest prospect that Neelie had seen for many a long day past.

As she hurried homeward, the leaves parted behind her,

and Miss Gwilt stepped softly into the open space. She stood there in triumph, tall, beautiful, and resolute. Her lovely colour brightened while she watched Neelie's retreating figure hastening lightly away from her over the grass.

"Cry, you little fool!" she said, with her quiet clear tones, and her steady smile of contempt. "Cry as you have never cried yet! You have seen the last of your sweetheart."

CHAPTER XI

MISS GWILT'S DIARY

"*All Saints' Terrace, New Road, London, July 28th, Monday night.*—I can hardly hold my head up, I am so tired. But, in my situation, I dare not trust anything to memory. Before I go to bed, I must write my customary record of the events of the day.

"So far, the turn of luck in my favour (it was long enough before it took the turn!) seems likely to continue. I succeeded in forcing Armadale—the brute required nothing short of forcing!—to leave Thorpe-Ambrose for London, alone in the same carriage with me, before all the people in the station. There was a full attendance of dealers in small scandal, all staring hard at us, and all evidently drawing their own conclusions. Either I knew nothing of Thorpe-Ambrose—or the town gossip is busy enough by this time with Mr. Armadale and Miss Gwilt.

"I had some difficulty with him for the first half-hour after we left the station. The guard (delightful man! I felt so grateful to him!) had shut us up together in expectation of half-a-crown at the end of the journey. Armadale was suspicious of me, and he showed it plainly. Little by little I tamed my wild beast—partly by taking care to display no curiosity about his journey to town, and partly by interesting him on the subject of his friend Midwinter; dwelling especially on the opportunity that now offered itself for a reconciliation between them. I kept harping on this string till I set his tongue going, and made him amuse me as a gentleman is bound to do when he has the honour of escorting a lady on a long railway journey.

"What little mind he has was full, of course, of his own affairs and Miss Milroy's. No words can express the

clumsiness he showed in trying to talk about himself, without taking me into his confidence or mentioning Miss Milroy's name.

"He was going to London, he gravely informed me, on a matter of indescribable interest to him. It was a secret for the present, but he hoped to tell it me soon; it had made a great difference already in the way in which he looked at the slanders spoken of him in Thorpe-Ambrose; he was too happy to care what the scandal-mongers said of him now, and he should soon stop their mouths by appearing in a new character that would surprise them all. So he blundered on, with the firm persuasion that he was keeping me quite in the dark. It was hard not to laugh, when I thought of my anonymous letter on its way to the major; but I managed to control myself—though, I must own, with some difficulty. As the time wore on, I began to feel a terrible excitement; the position was, I think, a little too much for me. There I was, alone with him, talking in the most innocent, easy, familiar manner, and having it in my mind all the time, to brush his life out of my way, when the moment comes, as I might brush a stain off my gown. It made my blood leap, and my cheeks flush. I caught myself laughing once or twice much louder than I ought—and long before we got to London I thought it desirable to put my face in hiding by pulling down my veil.

"There was no difficulty, on reaching the terminus, in getting him to come in the cab with me to the hotel where Midwinter is staying. He was all eagerness to be reconciled with his dear friend—principally, I have no doubt, because he wants the dear friend to lend a helping hand to the elopement. The real difficulty lay, of course, with Midwinter. My sudden journey to London had allowed me no opportunity of writing to combat his superstitious conviction that he and his former friend are better apart. I thought it wise to leave Armadale in the cab at the door, and to go into the hotel by myself to pave the way for him.

"Fortunately, Midwinter had not gone out. His delight at seeing me some days sooner than he had hoped, had something infectious in it, I suppose. Pooh! I may own the truth to my own diary! There was a moment when *I* forgot everything in the world but our two selves as completely as he did. I felt as if I was back in my 'teens—until I remembered the lout in the cab at the door. And then I was five-and-thirty again in an instant.

"His face altered when he heard who was below, and what

it was I wanted of him—he looked, not angry but distressed. He yielded, however, before long, not to my reasons, for I gave him none, but to my entreaties. His old fondness for his friend might possibly have had some share in persuading him against his will—but my opinion is that he acted entirely under the influence of his fondness for Me.

"I waited in the sitting-room while he went down to the door; so I knew nothing of what passed between them when they first saw each other again. But oh, the difference between the two men when the interval had passed, and they came upstairs together and joined me.

"They were both agitated, but in such different ways! The hateful Armadale, so loud and red and clumsy; the dear, lovable Midwinter, so pale and quiet, with such a gentleness in his voice when he spoke, and such tenderness in his eyes every time they turned my way. Armadale overlooked me as completely as if I had not been in the room. *He* referred to me over and over again in the conversation; *he* constantly looked at me to see what I thought, while I sat in my corner silently watching them; *he* wanted to go with me and see me safe to my lodgings, and spare me all trouble with the cabman and the luggage. When I thanked him and declined, Armadale looked unaffectedly relieved at the prospect of seeing my back turned, and of having his friend all to himself. I left him, with his awkward elbows half over the table, scrawling a letter (no doubt to Miss Milroy), and shouting to the waiter that he wanted a bed at the hotel. I had calculated on his staying as a matter of course where he found his friend staying. It was pleasant to find my anticipations realised, and to know that I have as good as got him now under my own eye.

"After promising to let Midwinter know where he could see me to-morrow, I went away in the cab to hunt for lodgings by myself.

"With some difficulty I have succeeded in getting an endurable sitting-room and bedroom in this house, where the people are perfect strangers to me. Having paid a week's rent in advance (for I naturally preferred dispensing with a reference), I find myself with exactly three shillings and ninepence left in my purse. It is impossible to ask Midwinter for money, after he has already paid Mrs. Oldershaw's note-of-hand. I must borrow something to-morrow on my watch and chain at the pawnbroker's. Enough to keep me going for a fortnight is all, and more than all, that I want.

In that time, or in less than that time, Midwinter will have married me.

July 29th, six o'clock.—Midwinter has just gone. The day for our marriage is a day determined on already.

"I have tried to rest and recover myself. I can't rest. I have come back to these leaves. There is much to be written in them since Midwinter has been here, that concerns me nearly.

"Let me begin with what I hate most to remember, and so be the sooner done with it—let me begin with the paltry string of falsehoods which I told him about my family troubles.

"What *can* be the secret of this man's hold on me? How is it that he alters me so that I hardly know myself again? I was like myself in the railway carriage yesterday with Armadale. It was surely frightful to be talking to the living man, through the whole of that long journey, with the knowledge in me all the while that I meant to be his widow—and yet I was only excited and fevered. Hour after hour I never shrunk once from speaking to Armadale—but the first trumpery falsehood I told Midwinter, turned me cold when I saw that he believed it! I felt a dreadful hysterical choking in the throat when he entreated me not to reveal my troubles. And once—I am horrified when I think of it—once, when he said, 'If I *could* love you more dearly, I should love you more dearly, now,' I was within a hair's breadth of turning traitor to myself. I was on the very point of crying out to him, 'Lies! all lies! I'm a fiend in human shape! Marry the wretchedest creature that prowls the streets, and you will marry a better woman than me!' Yes! the seeing his eyes moisten, the hearing his voice tremble while I was deceiving him, shook me in that way. I have seen handsomer men by hundreds, cleverer men by dozens. What can this man have roused in me? Is it Love? I thought I *had* loved, never to love again. Does a woman not love, when the man's hardness to her drives her to drown herself? A man drove *me* to that last despair in days gone by. Did all my misery at that time come from something which was not Love? Have I lived to be five-and-thirty, and am I only feeling, now, what Love really is?—now, when it is too late? Ridiculous. Besides, what is the use of asking? What do I know about it? What does any woman ever know? The more we think of it, the more we deceive ourselves. I wish I had been born an animal. My beauty might have been of some use to me then—it might have got me a good master.

"Here is a whole page of my diary filled; and nothing written yet that is of the slightest use to me! My miserable made-up story must be told over again here, while the incidents are fresh in my memory— or how am I to refer to it consistently on after-occasions when I may be obliged to speak of it again?

"There was nothing new in what I told him: it was the common-place rubbish of the circulating libraries. A dead father; a lost fortune; vagabond brothers, whom I dread ever seeing again; a bedridden mother dependent on my exertions —No! I can't write it down! I hate myself, I despise myself, when I remember that *he* believed it because I said it—that *he* was distressed by it, because it was my story! I will face the chances of contradicting myself—I will risk discovery and ruin — anything rather than dwell on that contemptible deception of him a moment longer.

"My lies came to an end at last. And then he talked to me of himself, and of his prospects. Oh, what a relief it was to turn to that, at the time! What a relief it is to come to it now!

"He has accepted the offer about which he wrote to me at Thorpe-Ambrose; and he is now engaged as occasional foreign correspondent to the new newspaper. His first destination is Naples. I wish it had been some other place, for I have certain past associations with Naples which I am not at all anxious to renew. It has been arranged that he is to leave England not later than the eleventh of next month. By that time, therefore, I, who am to go with him, must go with him as his wife.

"There is not the slightest difficulty about the marriage. All this part of it is so easy, that I begin to dread an accident.

"The proposal to keep the thing strictly private—which it might have embarrassed me to make—comes from Midwinter. Marrying me in his own name— the name that he has kept concealed from every living creature but myself and Mr. Brock—it is his interest that not a soul who knows him should be present at the ceremony; his friend Armadale least of all. He has been a week in London already. When another week has passed, he proposes to get the Licence, and to be married in the church belonging to the parish in which the hotel is situated. These are the only necessary formalities. I had but to say 'Yes' (he told me), and to feel no further anxiety about the future. I said 'Yes,' with such a devouring anxiety about the future, that I was afraid

he would see it. What minutes the next few minutes were, when he whispered delicious words to me, while I hid my face on his breast!

"I recovered myself first, and led him back to the subject of Armadale; having my own reasons for wanting to know what they said to each other, after I had left them yesterday.

"The manner in which Midwinter replied, showed me that he was speaking under the restraint of respecting a confidence placed in him by his friend. Long before he had done, I detected what the confidence was. Armadale had been consulting him (exactly as I anticipated) on the subject of the elopement. Although he appears to have remonstrated against taking the girl secretly away from her home, Midwinter seems to have felt some delicacy about speaking strongly; remembering (widely different as the circumstances are) that he was contemplating a private marriage himself. I gathered, at any rate, that he had produced very little effect by what he had said; and that Armadale had already carried out his absurd intention of consulting the head clerk in the office of his London lawyers.

"Having got as far as this, Midwinter put the question which I felt must come sooner or later. He asked if I objected to our engagement being mentioned in the strictest secrecy to his friend.

"'I will answer,' he said, 'for Allan's respecting any confidence that I place in him. And I will undertake, when the time comes, so to use my influence over him as to prevent his being present at the marriage, and discovering (what he must never know) that my name is the same as his own. It would help me,' he went on, 'to speak more strongly about the object that brought him to London, if I can requite the frankness with which he has spoken of his private affairs to me, by the same frankness on my side.'

"I had no choice but to give the necessary permission, and I gave it. It is of the utmost importance to me to know what course Major Milroy takes with his daughter and Armadale, after receiving my anonymous letter; and unless I invite Armadale's confidence in some way, I am nearly certain to be kept in the dark. Let him once be trusted with the knowledge that I am to be Midwinter's wife; and what he tells his friend about his love-affair, he will tell me.

"When it had been understood between us that Armadale was to be taken into our confidence, we began to talk about ourselves again. How the time flew! What a sweet enchant-

ment it was to forget everything in his arms! How he loves me!—ah, poor fellow, how he loves me!

"*July* 30*th*.—News at last! Armadale has heard from Miss Milroy. My anonymous letter has produced its effect. The girl is removed from Thorpe-Ambrose already; and the whole project of the elopement is blown to the winds at once and for ever. This was the substance of what Midwinter had to tell me, when I met him in the Park. I affected to be excessively astonished, and to feel the necessary feminine longing to know all the particulars. 'Not that I expect to have my curiosity satisfied,' I added, 'for Mr. Armadale and I are little better than mere acquaintances after all.'

"'You are far more than a mere acquaintance in Allan's eyes,' said Midwinter. 'Having your permission to trust him, I have already told him how near and dear you are to me.'

"Hearing this, I thought it desirable, before I put any questions about Miss Milroy, to attend to my own interests first, and to find out what effect the announcement of my coming marriage had produced on Armadale. It was possible that he might be still suspicious of me, and that the inquiries he made in London, at Mrs. Milroy's instigation, might be still hanging on his mind.

"'Did Mr. Armadale seem surprised,' I asked, 'when you told him of our engagement, and when you said it was to be kept a secret from everybody?'

"'He seemed greatly surprised,' said Midwinter, 'to hear that we were going to be married. All he said when I told him it must be kept a secret was, that he supposed there were reasons on your side for making the marriage a private one.'

"'What did you say,' I inquired, 'when he made that remark?'

"'I said the reasons were on my side,' answered Midwinter. 'And I thought it right to add—considering that Allan had allowed himself to be misled by the ignorant distrust of you at Thorpe-Ambrose—that you had confided to me the whole of your sad family story, and that you had amply justified your unwillingness, under any ordinary circumstances, to speak of your private affairs.'

('I breathed freely again. He had said just what was wanted, just in the right way.)

"'Thank you,' I said, for putting me right in your friend's estimation. Does he wish to see me?' I added, by way of

getting back to the other subject of Miss Milroy and the elopement.

"'He is longing to see you,' returned Midwinter. 'He is in great distress, poor fellow—distress which I have done my best to soothe, but which I believe would yield far more readily to a woman's sympathy than to mine.'

"'Where is he now?' I asked.

"He was at the hotel; and to the hotel I instantly proposed that we should go. It is a busy, crowded place; and (with my veil down) I have less fear of compromising myself there than at my quiet lodgings. Besides, it is vitally important to me to know what Armadale does next, under this total change of circumstances,—for I must so control his proceedings as to get him away from England if I can. We took a cab: such was my eagerness to sympathise with the heart-broken lover, that we took a cab!

"Anything so ridiculous as Armadale's behaviour under the double shock of discovering that his young lady has been taken away from him, and that I am to be married to Midwinter, I never before witnessed in all my experience. To say that he was like a child, is a libel on all children who are not born idiots. He congratulated me on my coming marriage, and execrated the unknown wretch who had written the anonymous letter, little thinking that he was speaking of one and the same person in one and the same breath. Now he submissively acknowledged that Major Milroy had his rights as a father, and now he reviled the major as having no feeling for anything but his mechanics and his clock. At one moment he started up, with the tears in his eyes, and declared that his 'darling Neelie' was an angel on earth. At another he sat down sulkily, and thought that a girl of her spirit might have run away on the spot and joined him in London. After a good half-hour of this absurd exhibition, I succeeded in quieting him; and then a few words of tender inquiry produced what I had expressly come to the hotel to see—Miss Milroy's letter.

"It was outrageously long and rambling and confused—in short, the letter of a fool. I had to wade through plenty of vulgar sentiment and lamentation, and to lose time and patience over maudlin outbursts of affection, and nauseous kisses enclosed in circles of ink. However, I contrived to extract the information I wanted at last; and here it is:—

"The major, on receipt of my anonymous warning, appears to have sent at once for his daughter, and to have shown her

the letter. 'You know what a hard life I lead with your mother; don't make it harder still, Neelie, by deceiving me.' That was all the poor old gentleman said. I always did like the major; and, though he was afraid to show it, I know he always liked me. His appeal to his daughter (if *her* account of it is to be believed) cut her to the heart. She burst out crying (let her alone for crying at the right moment!) and confessed everything.

"After giving her time to recover herself (if he had given her a good box on the ears it would have been more to the purpose!) the major seems to have put certain questions, and to have become convinced (as I was convinced myself) that his daughter's heart, or fancy, or whatever she calls it, was really and truly set on Armadale. The discovery evidently distressed as well as surprised him. He appears to have hesitated, and to have maintained his own unfavourable opinion of Miss Neelie's lover for some little time. But his daughter's tears and entreaties (so like the weakness of the dear old gentleman!) shook him at last. Though he firmly refused to allow of any marriage engagement at present, he consented to overlook the clandestine meetings in the park, and to put Armadale's fitness to become his son-in-law to the test, on certain conditions.

"These conditions are, that for the next six months to come, all communication is to be broken off, both personally and by writing, between Armadale and Miss Milroy. That space of time is to be occupied by the young gentleman as he himself thinks best, and by the young lady in completing her education at school. If, when the six months have passed, they are both still of the same mind, and if Armadale's conduct in the interval has been such as to improve the major's opinion of him, he will be allowed to present himself in the character of Miss Milroy's suitor—and, in six months more, if all goes well, the marriage may take place.

"I declare I could kiss the dear old major, if I was only within reach of him! If I had been at his elbow, and had dictated the conditions myself, I could have asked for nothing better than this. Six months of total separation between Armadale and Miss Milroy. In half that time—with all communication cut off between the two—it must go hard with me indeed if I don't find myself dressed in the necessary mourning, and publicly recognised as Armadale's widow.

"But I am forgetting the girl's letter. She gives her father's reasons for making his conditions, in her father's own words.

The major seems to have spoken so sensibly and so feelingly that he left his daughter no decent alternative—and he leaves Armadale no decent alternative—but to submit. As well as I can remember he seems to have expressed himself to Miss Neelie in these, or nearly in these terms:—

"'Don't think I am behaving cruelly to you, my dear—I am merely asking you to put Mr. Armadale to the proof. It is not only right, it is absolutely necessary, that you should hold no communication with him for some time to come; and I will show you why. In the first place if you go to school, the necessary rules in such places—necessary for the sake of the other girls—would not permit you to see Mr. Armadale, or to receive letters from him; and, if you *are* to become mistress of Thorpe-Ambrose, to school you must go, for you would be ashamed, if you occupied the position of a lady of station, without having the accomplishments which all ladies of station are expected to possess. In the second place, I want to see whether Mr. Armadale will continue to think of you as he thinks now, without being encouraged in his attachment by seeing you, or reminded of it by hearing from you. If I am wrong in thinking him flighty and unreliable; and if your opinion of him is the right one, this is not putting the young man to an unfair test—true love survives much longer separation than a separation of six months. And when that time is over, and well over; and when I have had him under my own eye for another six months, have learnt to think as highly of him as you do—even then, my dear, after all that terrible delay, you will still be a married woman before you are eighteen. Think of this, Neelie; and show that you love me and trust me, by accepting my proposal. I will hold no communication with Mr. Armadale myself. I will leave it to you to write and tell him what has been decided on. He may write back one letter, and one only, to acquaint you with his decision. After that, for the sake of your reputation, nothing more is to be said, and nothing more is to be done, and the matter is to be kept strictly private until the six months' interval is at an end.'

"When I had done with the letter—I had requested permission to read parts of it which I particularly admired, for the second and third time!—we all consulted together in a friendly way about what Armadale was to do.

"He was fool enough, at the outset, to protest against submitting to Major Milroy's conditions. He declared, with his odious red face looking the picture of brute health, that he should never survive a six months' separation from his

beloved Neelie. Midwinter (as may easily be imagined) seemed a little ashamed of him, and joined me in bringing him to his senses. We showed him what would have been plain enough to anybody but a booby, that there was no honourable, or even decent alternative left but to follow the example of submission set by the young lady. 'Wait—and you will have her for your wife,' was what I said. 'Wait—and you will force the major to alter his unjust opinion of you,' was what Midwinter added. With two clever people hammering common sense into his head at that rate, it is needless to say that his head gave way, and he submitted.

"Having decided him to accept the major's conditions (I was careful to warn him before he wrote to Miss Milroy, that my engagement to Midwinter was to be kept as strictly secret from her as from everybody else), the next question we had to settle related to his future proceedings. I was ready with the necessary arguments to stop him, if he had proposed returning to Thorpe-Ambrose. But he proposed nothing of the sort. On the contrary, he declared, of his own accord, that nothing would induce him to go back. The place and the people were associated with everything that was hateful to him. There would be no Miss Milroy now to meet him in the park, and no Midwinter to keep him company in the solitary house. 'I'd rather break stones on the road,' was the sensible and cheerful way in which he put it, 'than go back to Thorpe-Ambrose.'

"'Why not go to Somersetshire,' said Midwinter; 'and see your good friend, and my good friend, Mr. Brock?'

"Armadale caught at the proposal readily enough. He longed, in the first place, to see 'dear old Brock,' and he longed, in the second place, to see his yacht. After staying a few days more in London with Midwinter, he would gladly go to Somersetshire. But what after that?

"Seeing my opportunity, *I* came to the rescue this time. 'You have got a yacht, Mr. Armadale,' I said; 'and you know that Midwinter is going to Italy. When you are tired of Somersetshire, why not make a voyage to the Mediterranean, and meet your friend, and your friend's wife, at Naples?'

"I made the allusion to 'his friend's wife,' with the most becoming modesty and confusion. Armadale was enchanted. I had hit on the best of all ways of occupying the weary time. He started up, and wrung my hand in quite an ecstasy of gratitude. How I do hate people who can only express their feelings by hurting other people's hands!

"Midwinter was as pleased with my proposal as Armadale;

but he saw difficulties in the way of carrying it out. He considered the yacht too small for a cruise to the Mediterranean, and he thought it desirable to hire a larger vessel. His friend thought otherwise. I left them arguing the question. It was quite enough for me to have made sure, in the first place, that Armadale will not return to Thorpe-Ambrose; and to have decided him, in the second place, on going abroad. He may go how he likes. I should prefer the small yacht myself—for there seems to be a chance that the small yacht might do me the inestimable service of drowning him. . . .

"*Five o'clock.*—The excitement of feeling that I had got Armadale's future movements completely under my own control, made me so restless, when I returned to my lodgings, that I was obliged to go out again, and do something. A new interest to occupy me being what I wanted, I went to Pimlico to have it out with Mother Oldershaw.

"I walked—and made up my mind, on the way, that I would begin by quarrelling with her.

"When I got to Pimlico, a surprise was in store for me. The house was shut up—not only on Mrs. Oldershaw's side, but on Doctor Downward's as well. A padlock was on the shop-door; and a man was hanging about on the watch, who might have been an ordinary idler certainly, but who looked, to my mind, like a policeman in disguise.

"Knowing the risks the doctor runs, in his particular form of practice, I suspected at once that something serious had happened, and that even cunning Mrs. Oldershaw was compromised this time. Without stopping, or making any inquiry, therefore, I called the first cab that passed me, and drove to the post-office to which I had desired my letters to be forwarded if any came for me after I left my Thorpe-Ambrose lodging.

"On inquiry a letter was produced for 'Miss Gwilt.' It was in Mother Oldershaw's handwriting, and it told me (as I had supposed) that the doctor had got into a serious difficulty—that she was herself most unfortunately mixed up in the matter—and that they were both in hiding for the present. The letter ended with some sufficiently venomous sentences about my conduct at Thorpe-Ambrose, and with a warning that I have not heard the last of Mrs. Oldershaw yet. It relieved me to find her writing in this way—for she would have been civil and cringing if she had had any suspicion of

what I have really got in view. I burnt the letter as soon as the candles came up. And there, for the present, is an end of the connection between Mother Jezebel and me. I must do all my own dirty work now—and I shall be all the safer, perhaps, for trusting nobody's hands to do it but my own.

"*July* 31*st*.—More useful information for me. I met Midwinter again in the Park (on the pretext that my reputation might suffer, if he called too often at my lodgings); and heard the last news of Armadale since I left the hotel yesterday.

"After he had written to Miss Milroy, Midwinter took the opportunity of speaking to him about the necessary business arrangements during his absence from the great house. It was decided that the servants should be put on board wages, and that Mr. Bashwood should be left in charge. (Somehow, I don't like this reappearance of Mr. Bashwood in connection with my present interests, but there is no help for it.) The next question—the question of money—was settled at once by Mr. Armadale himself. All his available ready-money (a large sum) is to be lodged by Mr. Bashwood in Coutts's Bank, and to be there deposited in Armadale's name. This, he said, would save him the worry of any further letter-writing to his steward, and would enable him to get what he wanted, when he went abroad, at a moment's notice. The plan thus proposed being certainly the simplest and the safest, was adopted with Midwinter's full concurrence; and here the business discussion would have ended, if the everlasting Mr. Bashwood had not turned up again in the conversation, and prolonged it in an entirely new direction.

"On reflection, it seems to have struck Midwinter that the whole responsibility at Thorpe-Ambrose ought not to rest on Mr. Bashwood's shoulders. Without in the least distrusting him, Midwinter felt, nevertheless, that he ought to have somebody set over him, to apply to, in case of emergency. Armadale made no objection to this; he only asked, in his helpless way, who the person was to be?

"The answer was not an easy one to arrive at.

"Either of the two solicitors at Thorpe-Ambrose might have been employed—but Armadale was on bad terms with both of them. Any reconciliation with such a bitter enemy as the elder lawyer, Mr. Darch, was out of the question; and reinstating Mr. Pedgift in his former position, implied a tacit sanction on Armadale's part, of the lawyer's abominable con-

duct towards *me*, which was scarcely consistent with the respect and regard that he felt for a lady who was soon to be his friend's wife. After some further discussion, Midwinter hit on a new suggestion which appeared to meet the difficulty. He proposed that Armadale should write to a respectable solicitor at Norwich, stating his position in general terms, and requesting that gentleman to act as Mr. Bashwood's adviser and superintendent when occasion required. Norwich being within an easy railway ride of Thorpe-Ambrose, Armadale saw no objection to the proposal, and promised to write to the Norwich lawyer. Fearing that he might make some mistake, if he wrote without assistance, Midwinter had drawn him out a draft of the necessary letter, and Armadale was now engaged in copying the draft, and also in writing to Mr. Bashwood to lodge the money immediately in Coutts's Bank.

"These details are so dry and uninteresting in themselves, that I hesitated at first about putting them down in my diary. But a little reflection has convinced me that they are too important to be passed over. Looked at from my point of view, they mean this—that Armadale's own act is now cutting him off from all communication with Thorpe-Ambrose, even by letter. *He is as good as dead already, to everybody he leaves behind him.* The causes which have led to such a result as that, are causes which certainly claim the best place I can give them in these pages.

"*August* 1*st.*—Nothing to record, but that I have had a long quiet, happy day with Midwinter. He hired a carriage, and we drove to Richmond, and dined there. After to-day's experience, it is impossible to deceive myself any longer. Come what may of it, I love him.

"I have fallen into low spirits since he left me. A persuasion has taken possession of my mind, that the smooth and prosperous course of my affairs since I have been in London, is too smooth and prosperous to last. There is something oppressing me to-night, which is more than the oppression of the heavy London air.

"*August 2nd. Three o'clock.*—My presentiments, like other people's, have deceived me often enough—but I am almost afraid that my presentiment of last night was really prophetic, for once in a way.

"I went after breakfast to a milliner's in this neighbourhood to order a few cheap summer things, and thence to Mid-

winter's hotel to arrange with him for another day in the country. I drove to the milliner's, and to the hotel, and part of the way back. Then, feeling disgusted with the horrid close smell of the cab (somebody had been smoking in it, I suppose), I got out to walk the rest of the way. Before I had been two minutes on my feet, I discovered that I was being followed by a strange man.

"This may mean nothing but that an idle fellow has been struck by my figure and my appearance generally. My face could have made no impression on him—for it was hidden as usual by my veil. Whether he followed me (in a cab of course) from the milliner's, or from the hotel, I cannot say. Nor am I quite certain whether he did or did not track me to this door. I only know that I lost sight of him before I got back. There is no help for it but to wait till events enlighten me. If there is anything serious in what has happened, I shall soon discover it.

"*Five o'clock.* It *is* serious. Ten minutes since, I was in my bedroom, which communicates with the sitting-room. I was just coming out, when I heard a strange voice on the landing outside—a woman's voice. The next instant the sitting-room door was suddenly opened; the woman's voice said, 'Are these the apartments you have got to let?'—and though the landlady, behind her, answered, 'No! higher up, ma'am,' the woman came on straight to my bedroom, as if she had not heard. I had just time to slam the door in her face before she saw me. The necessary explanations and apologies followed between the landlady and the stranger in the sitting-room—and then I was left alone again.

"I have no time to write more. It is plain that somebody has an interest in trying to identify me, and that, but for my own quickness, the strange woman would have accomplished this object by taking me by surprise. She and the man who followed me in the street are, I suspect, in league together; and there is probably somebody in the background whose interests they are serving. Is Mother Oldershaw attacking me in the dark? or who else can it be? No matter who it is; my present situation is too critical to be trifled with. I must get away from this house to-night, and leave no trace behind me by which I can be followed to another place.

"*August 3rd.—Gary Street, Tottenham Court Road.*—I got away last night (after writing an excuse to Midwinter, in which 'my invalid mother' figured as the all-sufficient cause

of my disappearance); and I have found refuge here. It has cost me some money; but my object is attained! Nobody can possibly have traced me from All Saints' Terrace to this address.

"After paying my landlady the necessary forfeit for leaving her without notice, I arranged with her son that he should take my boxes in a cab to the cloak-room at the nearest railway station, and send me the ticket in a letter, to wait my application for it at the post-office. While he went his way in one cab, I went mine in another, with a few things for the night in my little handbag.

"I drove straight to the milliner's shop—which I had observed, when I was there yesterday, had a back entrance into a mews, for the apprentices to go in and out by. I went in at once, leaving the cab waiting for me at the door. 'A man is following me,' I said, 'and I want to get rid of him. Here is my cab-fare; wait ten minutes before you give it to the driver, and let me out at once by the backway!' In a moment I was out in the mews—in another, I was in the next street—in a third, I hailed a passing omnibus, and was a free woman again.

"Having now cut off all communication between me and my last lodgings, the next precaution (in case Midwinter or Armadale are watched) is to cut off all communication, for some days to come, at least, between me and the hotel. I have written to Midwinter—making my supposititious mother once more the excuse—to say that I am tied to my nursing duties, and that we must communicate by writing only for the present. Doubtful as I still am of who my hidden enemy really is, I can do no more to defend myself than I have done now.

"*August 4th.*—The two friends at the hotel have both written to me. Midwinter expresses his regret at our separation, in the tenderest terms. Armadale writes an entreaty for help under very awkward circumstances. A letter from Major Milroy has been forwarded to him from the great house, and he encloses it in his letter to me.

"Having left the seaside, and placed his daughter safely at the school originally chosen for her (in the neighbourhood of Ely), the major appears to have returned to Thorpe-Ambrose at the close of last week; to have heard then, for the first time, the reports about Armadale and me; and to have written instantly to Armadale to tell him so.

"The letter is stern and short. Major Milroy dismisses

the report as unworthy of credit, because it is impossible for him to believe in such an act of 'cold-blooded treachery', as the scandal would imply, if the scandal were true. He simply writes to warn Armadale that, if he is not more careful in his actions for the future, he must resign all pretensions to Miss Milroy's hand. 'I neither expect, nor wish for, an answer to this' (the letter ends), 'for I desire to receive no mere protestations in words. By your conduct, and by your conduct alone, I shall judge you as time goes on. Let me also add, that I positively forbid you to consider this letter as an excuse for violating the terms agreed on between us, by writing again to my daughter. You have no need to justify yourself in her eyes—for I fortunately removed her from Thorpe-Ambrose before this abominable report had time to reach her; and I shall take good care, for her sake, that she is not agitated and unsettled by hearing it where she is now.'

"Armadale's petition to me, under these circumstances, entreats (as I am the innocent cause of the new attack on his character), that I will write to the major to absolve him of all indiscretion in the matter, and to say that he could not, in common politeness, do otherwise than accompany me to London.

"I forgive the impudence of his request, in consideration of the news that he sends me. It is certainly another circumstance in my favour, that the scandal at Thorpe-Ambrose is not to be allowed to reach Miss Milroy's ears. With her temper (if she did hear it) she might do something desperate in the way of claiming her lover, and might compromise me seriously. As for my own course with Armadale, it is easy enough. I shall quiet him by promising to write to Major Milroy; and I shall take the liberty, in my own private interests, of not keeping my word.

"Nothing in the least suspicious has happened to-day. Whoever my enemies are, they have lost me, and between this and the time when I leave England they shall not find me again. I have been to the post-office, and have got the ticket for my luggage enclosed to me in a letter from All Saints' Terrace as I directed. The luggage itself I shall still leave at the cloakroom, until I see the way before me more clearly than I see it now.

August 5th.—Two letters again from the hotel. Midwinter writes to remind me, in the prettiest possible manner, that he will have lived long enough in the parish by to-morrow to be able to get our marriage licence, and that he proposes applying

for it in the usual way at Doctors' Commons. Now, if I am ever to say it, is the time to say No. I can't say No. There is the plain truth—and there is an end of it!

"Armadale's letter is a letter of farewell. He thanks me for my kindness in consenting to write to the major, and bids me good-bye till we meet again at Naples. He has learnt from his friend that there are private reasons which will oblige him to forbid himself the pleasure of being present at our marriage. Under these circumstances, there is nothing to keep him in London. He has made all his business arrangements; he goes to Somersetshire by to-night's train; and, after staying some time with Mr. Brock, he will sail for the Mediterranean from the Bristol Channel (in spite of Midwinter's objections) in his own yacht.

"The letter encloses a jeweller's box, with a ring in it—Armadale's present to me on my marriage. It is a ruby—but rather a small one, and set in the worst possible taste. He would have given Miss Milroy a ring worth ten times the money, if it had been *her* marriage present. There is no more hateful creature, in my opinion, than a miserly young man. I wonder whether his trumpery little yacht will drown him?

"I am so excited and fluttered, I hardly know what I am writing. Not that I shrink from what is coming—I only feel as if I was being hurried on faster than I quite like to go. At this rate, if nothing happens, Midwinter will have married me, by the end of the week. And then——!

"*August 6th.*—If anything could startle me now, I should feel startled by the news that has reached me to-day.

"On his return to the hotel this morning, after getting the marriage licence, Midwinter found a telegram waiting for him. It contained an urgent message from Armadale, announcing that Mr. Brock had had a relapse, and that all hope of his recovery was pronounced by the doctors to be at an end. By the dying man's own desire, Midwinter was summoned to take leave of him, and was entreated by Armadale not to lose a moment in starting for the rectory by the first train.

"The hurried letter which tells me this, tells me also that, by the time I receive it, Midwinter will be on his way to the west. He promises to write at greater length, after he has seen Mr. Brock, by to-night's post.

"This news has an interest for me, which Midwinter little suspects. There is but one human creature, besides myself, who knows the secret of his birth and his name—and that

one, is the old man who now lies waiting for him at the point of death. What will they say to each other at the last moment? Will some chance word take them back to the time when I was in Mrs. Armadale's service at Madeira? Will they speak of *me*?

"*August 7th.*—The promised letter has just reached me. No parting words have been exchanged between them—it was all over before Midwinter reached Somersetshire. Armadale met him at the rectory gate with the news that Mr. Brock was dead.

"I try to struggle against it, but, coming after the strange complication of circumstances that has been closing round me for weeks past, there is something in this latest event of all that shakes my nerves. But one last chance of detection stood in my way when I opened my diary yesterday. When I open it to-day, that chance is removed by Mr. Brock's death. It means something; I wish I knew what.

"The funeral is to be on Saturday morning. Midwinter will attend it as well as Armadale. But he proposes returning to London first; and he writes word that he will call to-night, in the hope of seeing me on his way from the station to the hotel. Even if there was any risk in it, I should see him, as things are now. But there is no risk if he comes here from the station, instead of coming from the hotel.

"*Five o'clock.*—I was not mistaken in believing that my nerves were all unstrung. Trifles that would not have cost me a second thought at other times, weigh heavily on my mind now.

"Two hours since, in despair of knowing how to get through the day, I bethought myself of the milliner who is making my summer dress. I had intended to go and try it on yesterday—but it slipped out of my memory, in the excitement of hearing about Mr. Brock. So I went this afternoon, eager to do anything that might help me to get rid of myself. I have returned, feeling more uneasy and more depressed than I felt when I went out—for I have come back, fearing that I may yet have reason to repent not having left my unfinished dress on the milliner's hands.

"Nothing happened to me, this time, in the street. It was only in the trying-on room that my suspicions were roused; and, there, it certainly did cross my mind that the attempt to discover me, which I defeated at All Saints' Terrace, was not

given up yet, and that some of the shopwomen had been tampered with, if not the mistress herself.

"Can I give myself anything in the shape of a reason for this impression? Let me think a little.

"I noticed two things which were out of the ordinary routine, under the circumstances. In the first place, there were twice as many women as were needed in the trying-on room. This looked suspicious—and yet, I might have accounted for it in more ways than one. Is it not the slack time now? and don't I know by experience that I am the sort of woman about whom other women are always spitefully curious? I thought again, in the second place, that one of the assistants persisted rather oddly in keeping me turned in a particular direction, with my face towards the glazed and curtained door that led into the work-room. But, after all, she gave a reason, when I asked for it. She said the light fell better on me that way—and, when I looked round, there was the window to prove her right. Still, these trifles produced such an effect on me, at the time, that I purposely found fault with the dress, so as to have an excuse for trying it on again, before I told them where I lived, and had it sent home. Pure fancy, I dare say. Pure fancy, perhaps, at the present moment. I don't care—I shall act on instinct (as they say), and give up the dress. In plainer words still, I won't go back.

"*Midnight.*—Midwinter came to see me as he promised. An hour has passed since we said good-night; and here I still sit, with my pen in my hand, thinking of him. No words of mine can describe what has passed between us. The end of it is all I can write in these pages—and the end of it is, that he has shaken my resolution. For the first time since I saw the easy way to Armadale's life at Thorpe-Ambrose, I feel as if the man whom I have doomed in my own thoughts, had a chance of escaping me.

"Is it my love for Midwinter that has altered me? Or is it *his* love for *me* that has taken possession, not only of all I wish to give him, but of all I wish to keep from him as well? I feel as if I had lost myself—lost myself, I mean, in *him*—all through the evening. He was in great agitation about what had happened in Somersetshire—and he made me feel as disheartened and as wretched about it as he did. Though he never confessed it in words, I know that Mr. Brock's death has startled him as an ill-omen for our marriage—I know it, because I feel Mr. Brock's death as an ill-omen too. The

superstition—*his* superstition—took so strong a hold on me, that when we grew calmer, and he spoke of the future—when he told me that he must either break his engagement with his new employers, or go abroad, as he is pledged to go, on Monday next—I actually shrank at the thought of our marriage following close on Mr. Brock's funeral; I actually said to him, in the impulse of the moment, 'Go, and begin your new life alone! go, and leave me here to wait for happier times.'

"He took me in his arms. He sighed, and kissed me with an angelic tenderness. He said—oh, so softly and so sadly!—'I have no life now, apart from *you*.' As those words passed his lips, the thought seemed to rise in my mind like an echo, 'Why not live out all the days that are left to me, happy and harmless in a love like this!' I can't explain it—I can't realise it. That was the thought in me at the time; and that is the thought in me still. I see my own hand while I write the words—and I ask myself whether it is really the hand of Lydia Gwilt!

"Armadale——

"No! I will never write, I will never think of Armadale again.

"Yes! Let me write once more—let me think once more of him, because it quiets me to know that he is going away, and that the sea will have parted us before I am married. His old home is home to him no longer, now that the loss of his mother has been followed by the loss of his best and earliest friend. When the funeral is over, he had decided to sail the same day for the foreign seas. We may, or we may not, meet at Naples. Shall I be an altered woman, if we do? I wonder; I wonder!

"*August 8th.*—A line from Midwinter. He has gone back to Somersetshire to be in readiness for the funeral to-morrow; and he will return here (after bidding Armadale good-bye) to-morrow evening.

"The last forms and ceremonies preliminary to our marriage have been complied with. I am to be his wife, on Monday next. The hour must not be later than half-past ten—which will give us just time, when the service is over, to get from the church door to the railway, and to start on our journey to Naples the same day.

"To-day—Saturday—Sunday! I am not afraid of the time; the time will pass. I am not afraid of myself, if I can

only keep all thoughts but one out of my mind. I love him! Day and night, till Monday comes, I will think of nothing but that. I love him!

"*August 9th.—Two o'clock.*—I rose early this morning, more depressed in spirits than usual. The re-beginning of one's life, at the re-beginning of every day, has already been something weary and hopeless to me for years past. I dreamt too all through the night—not of Midwinter and of my married life, as I had hoped to dream—but of the wretched conspiracy to discover me, by which I have been driven from one place to another, like a hunted animal. Nothing in the shape of a new revelation enlightened me in my sleep. All I could guess, dreaming, was what I had guessed waking, that Mother Oldershaw is the enemy who is attacking me in the dark.

"My restless night has, however, produced one satisfactory result. It has led to my winning the good graces of the servant here, and securing all the assistance she can give me when the time comes for making my escape.

"The girl noticed this morning that I looked pale and anxious. I took her into my confidence, to the extent of telling her that I was privately engaged to be married, and that I had enemies who were trying to part me from my sweetheart. This instantly roused her sympathy—and a present of a ten-shilling piece for her kind services to me did the rest. In the intervals of her house-work she has been with me nearly the whole morning; and I found out, among other things, that *her* sweetheart is a private soldier in the Guards, and that she expects to see him to-morrow. I have got money enough left, little as it is, to turn the head of any private in the British Army—and, if the person appointed to watch me to-morrow is a man, I think it just possible that he may find his attention disagreeably diverted from Miss Gwilt in the course of the evening.

"When Midwinter came here last from the railway, he came at half-past eight. How am I to get through the weary, weary hours between this and the evening? I think I shall darken my bedroom, and drink the blessing of oblivion from my bottle of drops.

"*Eleven o'clock.*—We have parted for the last time before the day comes that makes us man and wife.

"He has left me, as he left me before, with an absorbing subject of interest to think of in his absence. I noticed a

change in him the moment he entered the room. When he told me of the funeral, and of his parting with Armadale on board the yacht, though he spoke with feelings deeply moved, he spoke with a mastery over himself which is new to me in my experience of him. It was the same when our talk turned next on our own hopes and prospects. He was plainly disappointed when he found that my family embarrassments would prevent our meeting to-morrow, and plainly uneasy at the prospect of leaving me to find my way by myself on Monday to the church. But there was a certain hopefulness and composure of manner underlying it all, which produced so strong an impression on me that I was obliged to notice it.

"'You know what odd fancies take possession of me sometimes,' I said. 'Shall I tell you the fancy that has taken possession of me now? I can't help thinking that something has happened since we last saw each other, which you have not told me yet.'

"'Something *has* happened,' he answered. 'And it is something which you ought to know.'

"With those words he took out his pocket-book, and produced two written papers from it. One he looked at and put back. The other he placed on the table.

"'Before I tell you what this is, and how it came into my possession,' he said, 'I must own something that I have concealed from you. It is no more serious confession than the confession of my own weakness.'

"He then acknowledged to me, that the renewal of his friendship with Armadale had been clouded, through the whole period of their intercourse in London, by his own superstitious misgivings. He had obeyed the summons which called him to the rector's bedside, with the firm intention of confiding his previsions of coming trouble to Mr. Brock; and he had been doubly confirmed in his superstition, when he found that Death had entered the house before him, and had parted them, in this world, for ever. More than this, he had travelled back to be present at the funeral, with a secret sense of relief at the prospect of being parted from Armadale, and with a secret resolution to make the after-meeting agreed on between us three at Naples, a meeting that should never take place. With that purpose in his heart, he had gone up alone to the room prepared for him, on his arrival at the rectory, and had opened a letter which he found waiting for him on the table. The letter had only that day been discovered—dropped and lost—under the bed on which Mr. Brock had

died. It was in the rector's handwriting throughout; and the person to whom it was addressed, was Midwinter himself.

"Having told me this, nearly in the words in which I have written it, he gave me the written paper that lay on the table between us.

"'Read it,' he said; 'and you will not need to be told that my mind is at peace again, and that I took Allan's hand at parting, with a heart that was worthier of Allan's love.'

"I read the letter. There was no superstition to be conquered in *my* mind; there were no old feelings of gratitude towards Armadale, to be roused in *my* heart—and yet, the effect which the letter had had on Midwinter, was, I firmly believe, more than matched by the effect that the letter now produced on *me*.

"It was vain to ask him to leave it, and to let me read it again (as I wished) when I was left to myself. He is determined to keep it side by side with that other paper which I had seen him take out of his pocket-book, and which contains the written narrative of Armadale's Dream. All I could do was to ask his leave to copy it; and this he granted readily. I wrote the copy in his presence; and I now place it here in my diary, to mark a day which is one of the memorable days of my life.

"Boscombe Rectory, August 2nd.

"MY DEAR MIDWINTER—For the first time since the beginning of my illness, I found strength enough yesterday to look over my letters. One among them is a letter from Allan, which has been lying unopened on my table for ten days past. He writes to me in great distress, to say that there has been dissension between you, and that you have left him. If you still remember what passed between us, when you first opened your heart to me in the Isle of Man, you will be at no loss to understand how I have thought over this miserable news, through the night that has now passed, and you will not be surprised to hear, that I have roused myself this morning to make the effort of writing to you.

"I want no explanation of the circumstances which have parted you from your friend. If my estimate of your character is not founded on an entire delusion, the one influence which can have led to your estrangement from Allan, is the influence of that evil spirit of Superstition, which I have once already cast out of your heart—which I will once again conquer, please God, if I have strength enough to make my pen speak my mind to you in this letter.

"It is no part of my design to combat the belief which I know you to hold, that mortal creatures may be the objects of supernatural intervention in their pilgrimages through this world. Speaking as a reasonable man, I own that I cannot prove you to be wrong. Speaking as a believer in the Bible, I am bound to go farther, and to admit that you possess a higher than any human warrant for the faith that is in you. The one object which I have it at heart to attain, is to induce you to free yourself from the paralysing fatalism of the heathen and the savage, and to look at the mysteries that perplex, and the portents that daunt you, from the Christian's point of view. If I can succeed in this, I shall clear your mind of the ghastly doubts that now oppress it, and I shall re-unite you to your friend, never to be parted from him again.

"I have no means of seeing and questioning you. I can only send this letter to Allan to be forwarded, if he knows, or can discover, your present address. Placed in this position towards you, I am bound to assume all that *can* be assumed in your favour. I will take it for granted that something has happened to you or to Allan, which to your mind has not only confirmed the fatalist conviction in which your father died, but has added a new and terrible meaning to the warning which he sent you in his death-bed letter.

"On this common ground I meet you. On this common ground I appeal to your higher nature and your better sense.

"Preserve your present conviction that the events which have happened (be they what they may) are not to be reconciled with ordinary mortal coincidences and ordinary mortal laws; and view your own position by the best and clearest light that your supersition can throw on it. What are you? You are a helpless instrument in the hands of Fate. You are doomed, beyond all human capacity of resistance, to bring misery and destruction blindfold on a man to whom you have harmlessly and gratefully united yourself in the bonds of a brother's love. All that is morally firmest in your will and morally purest in your aspirations, avails nothing against the hereditary impulsion of you towards evil, caused by a crime which your father committed before you were born. In what does that belief end? It ends in the darkness in which you are now lost; in the self-contradictions in which you are now bewildered—in the stubborn despair by which a man profanes his own soul, and lowers himself to the level of the brutes that perish.

"Look up, my poor suffering brother—look up, my hardly-tried, my well-loved friend, higher than this! Meet the

doubts that now assail you from the blessed vantage-ground of Christian courage and Christian hope; and your heart will turn again to Allan, and your mind will be at peace. Happen what may, God is all-merciful, God is all-wise: natural or supernatural, it happens through Him. The mystery of Evil that perplexes our feeble minds, the sorrow and the suffering that torture us in this little life, leave the one great truth unshaken that the destiny of man is in the hands of his Creator, and that God's blessed Son died to make us worthier of it. Nothing that is done in unquestioning submission to the wisdom of the Almighty, is done wrong. No evil exists, out of which, in obedience to His laws, Good may not come. Be true to what Christ tells you is true. Encourage in yourself, be the circumstances what they may, all that is loving, all that is grateful, all that is patient, all that is forgiving, towards your fellow-men. And humbly and trustfully leave the rest to the God who made you, and to the Saviour who loved you better than his own life.

"This is the faith in which I have lived, by the Divine help and mercy, from my youth upward. I ask you earnestly, I ask you confidently, to make it your faith too. It is the mainspring of all the good I have ever done, of all the happiness I have ever known; it lightens my darkness, it sustains my hope; it comforts and quiets me, lying here, to live or die, I know not which. Let it sustain, comfort, and enlighten you. It will help you in your sorest need, as it has helped me in mine. It will show you another purpose in the events which brought you and Allan together than the purpose which your guilty father foresaw. Strange things, I do not deny it, have happened to you already. Stranger things still may happen before long, which I may not live to see. Remember, if that times comes, that I died firmly disbelieving in your influence over Allan being other than an influence for good. The great sacrifice of the Atonement—I say it reverently—has its mortal reflections, even in this world. If danger ever threatens Allan, you, whose father took his father's life—YOU, and no other, may be the man whom the providence of God has appointed to save him.

"Come to me, if I live. Go back to the friend who loves you whether I live or die.—Yours affectionately to the last,

"DECIMUS BROCK."

"'YOU, and no other, may be the man whom the providence of God has appointed to save him!'

"Those are the words which have shaken me to the soul. Those are the words which make me feel as if the dead man had left his grave, and had put his hand on the place in my heart where my terrible secret lies hidden from every living creature but myself. One part of the letter has come true already. The danger that it foresees, threatens Armadale at this moment—and threatens him from Me!

"If the favouring circumstances which have driven me thus far, drive me on to the end; and if that old man's last earthly conviction is prophetic of the truth, Armadale will escape me, do what I may. And Midwinter will be the victim who is sacrificed to save his life.

"It is horrible! it is impossible! it shall never be! At the thinking of it only, my hand trembles, and my heart sinks. I bless the trembling that unnerves me! I bless the sinking that turns me faint! I bless those words in the letter which have revived the relenting thoughts that first came to me two days since! Is it hard, now that events are taking me, smoothly and safely, nearer and nearer to the End—is it hard to conquer the temptation to go on? No! If there is only a chance of harm coming to Midwinter, the dread of that chance is enough to decide me—enough to strengthen me to conquer the temptation, for his sake. I have never loved him yet, never, never, never, and I love him now!

"*Sunday, August* 10*th*.—I am to be married to-morrow. To-morrow Armadale is to set sail for Naples—and death! He is to follow us from England. He shall not return."

THE END OF THE THIRD BOOK

BOOK THE FOURTH

CHAPTER I

MISS GWILT'S DIARY

"*London, November 9th.*—Armadale is dead! My husband and I went to Naples. There Armadale followed us, by sea and land. His yacht was wrecked off Portugal, but he escaped drowning, much to my disappointment. In Naples I met a friend of the old days, Manuel, who agreed to take care of Armadale for me. As his interpreter, he helped Armadale to purchase a yacht, and as the captain of that yacht he has killed Armadale. A newspaper before me reports the loss of the yacht with every soul on board—Armadale is dead!

"Midwinter has been transferred to Turin—long may he stay there! I am supposed to be in London to take care of my widowed mother—Midwinter, how I have fooled you!

"*November 23rd, Eight in the Morning.*—I rose an hour ago, and saw my way clearly to the first step that I must take, under present circumstances.

"It is of the utmost importance to me to know what is doing at Thorpe-Ambrose; and it would be the height of rashness, while I am quite in the dark in this matter, to venture there myself. The only other alternative is to write to somebody on the spot for news; and the only person I can write to is—Bashwood.

"I have just finished the letter. It is headed 'private and confidential', and signed 'Lydia Armadale.' There is nothing in it to compromise me, if the old fool is mortally offended by my treatment of him, and if he spitefully shows my letter to other people. But I don't believe he will do this. A man at his age forgives a woman anything, if the woman only encourages him. I have requested him, as a personal favour, to keep our correspondence for the present strictly private. I have hinted that my married life with my deceased husband has not been a happy one; and that I feel the injudiciousness of having married a *young* man. In the postscript I go farther still, and venture boldly on these comforting words—'I can

explain, dear Mr. Bashwood, what may have seemed false and deceitful in my conduct towards you, when you give me a personal opportunity.' If he was on the right side of sixty I should feel doubtful of results. But he is on the wrong side of sixty, and I believe he will give me my personal opportunity.

"*Ten o'clock.*—I have been looking over the copy of my marriage-certificate, with which I took care to provide myself on the wedding-day; and I have discovered, to my inexpressible dismay, an obstacle to my appearance in the character of Armadale's widow, which I now see for the first time.

"The description of Midwinter (under his own name) which the certificate presents, answers in every important particular, to what would have been the description of Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose, if I had really married him. 'Name and Surname'—Allan Armadale. 'Age'—twenty-one, instead of twenty-two, which might easily pass for a mistake. 'Condition'—Bachelor. 'Rank or Profession'—Gentleman. 'Residence at the time of Marriage'—Frant's Hotel, Darley Street. 'Father's Name and Surname'—Allan Armadale. 'Rank or Profession of Father'—Gentleman. Every particular (except the year's difference in their two ages) which answers for the one, answers for the other. But, suppose when I produce my copy of the certificate, that some meddlesome lawyer insists on looking at the original register? Midwinter's writing is as different as possible from the writing of his dead friend. The hand in which he has written 'Allan Armadale' in the book, has not a chance of passing for the hand in which Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose was accustomed to sign his name.

"Can I move safely in the matter, with such a pitfall as I see here, open under my feet? How can I tell? Where can I find an experienced person to inform me? I must shut up my diary and think.

"*Seven o'clock.*—My prospects have changed again since I made my last entry. I have received a warning to be careful in the future, which I shall not neglect; and I have (I believe) succeeded in providing myself with the advice and assistance of which I stand in need.

"After vainly trying to think of some better person to apply to in the difficulty which embarrassed me, I made a virtue of necessity, and set forth to surprise Mrs. Oldershaw by a visit from her darling Lydia! It is almost needless to

add that I determined to sound her carefully, and not to let any secret of importance out of my own possession.

"A sour and solemn old maid-servant admitted me into the house. When I asked for her mistress, I was reminded with the bitterest emphasis, that I had committed the impropriety of calling on a Sunday. Mrs. Oldershaw was at home, solely in consequence of being too unwell to go to church! The servant thought it very unlikely that she would see me. I thought it highly probable, on the contrary, that she would honour me with an interview in her own interests, if I sent in my name as 'Miss Gwilt'—and the event proved that I was right. After being kept waiting some minutes I was shown into the drawing-room.

"There sat Mother Jezebel, with the air of a woman resting on the high-road to heaven, dressed in a slate-coloured gown, with grey mittens on her hands, a severely simple cap on her head, and a volume of sermons on her lap. She turned up the whites of her eyes devoutly at the sight of me, and the first words she said were—'Oh, Lydia! Lydia! why are you not at church?'

"If I had been less anxious, the sudden presentation of Mrs. Oldershaw, in an entirely new character, might have amused me. But I was in no humour for laughing, and (my notes-of-hand being all paid), I was under no obligation to restrain my natural freedom of speech. 'Stuff and nonsense!' I said. 'Put your Sunday face in your pocket. I have got some news for you, since I last wrote from Thorpe-Ambrose.'

"The instant I mentioned 'Thorpe-Ambrose', the white of the old hypocrite's eyes showed themselves again, and she flatly refused to hear a word more from me on the subject of my proceedings in Norfolk. I insisted—but it was quite useless. Mother Oldershaw only shook her head and groaned, and informed me that her connection with the pomps and vanities of the world was at an end for ever. 'I have been born again, Lydia,' said the brazen old wretch, wiping her eyes. 'Nothing will induce me to return to the subject of that wicked speculation of yours on the folly of a rich young man.'

"After hearing this, I should have left her on the spot, but for one consideration which delayed me a moment longer.

"'As you have no further interest in my wicked speculation at Thorpe-Ambrose,' I said, 'perhaps you will give me back the written paper that I signed, when you were not quite such an exemplary person as you are now?'

"The shameless old hypocrite instantly shut her eyes and shuddered.

"'Does that mean Yes, or No?' I asked.

"'On moral and religious grounds, Lydia,' said Mrs. Oldershaw, 'it means No.'

"'On wicked and worldly grounds,' I rejoined, 'I beg to thank you for showing me your hand.'

"There could, indeed, be no doubt, now, about the object she really had in view. She would run no more risks and lend me no more money—she would leave me to win or lose, single-handed. If I lost, she would not be compromised. If I won, she would produce the paper I had signed, and profit by it without remorse. In my present situation it was mere waste of time and words to prolong the matter by any useless recrimination on my side. I put the warning away privately in my memory for future use, and got up to go.

"At the moment when I left my chair, there was a sharp double knock at the street door. Mrs. Oldershaw evidently recognised it. She rose in a violent hurry and rang the bell. 'I am too unwell to see anybody,' she said, when the servant appeared. 'Wait a moment, if you please,' she added, turning sharply on me, when the woman had left us to answer the door.

"It was small, very small, spitefulness on my part, I know—but the satisfaction of thwarting Mother Jezebel, even in a trifle, was not to be resisted. 'I can't wait,' I said; 'you reminded me just now that I ought to be at church.' Before she could answer, I was out of the room.

"As I put my foot on the first stair the street door was opened; and a man's voice inquired whether Mrs. Oldershaw was at home.

"I instantly recognised the voice. Doctor Downward!

"The doctor repeated the servant's message in a tone which betrayed unmistakable irritation at finding himself admitted no farther than the door.

"'Your mistress is not well enough to see visitors? Give her that card,' said the doctor, 'and say I expect her, the next time I call, to be well enough to see *me*.'

"If his voice had not told me plainly that he felt in no friendly mood towards Mrs. Oldershaw, I daresay I should have let him go without claiming his acquaintance. But, as things were, I felt an impulse to speak to him or to anybody who had a grudge against Mother Jezebel. There was more

of my small spitefulness in this, I suppose. Anyway, I slipped downstairs; and, following the doctor out quietly, overtook him in the street.

"I had recognised his voice, and I recognised his back as I walked behind him. But when I called him by his name, and when he turned round with a start and confronted me, I followed his example, and started on my side. The doctor's face was transformed into the face of a perfect stranger! His baldness had hidden itself under an artfully grizzled wig. He had allowed his whiskers to grow, and had dyed them to match his new head of hair. Hideous circular spectacles bestrode his nose in place of the neat double eyeglass that he used to carry in his hand; and a black neckerchief, surmounted by immense shirt-collars, appeared as the unworthy successor of the clerical white cravat of former times. Nothing remained of the man I once knew but the comfortable plumpness of his figure, and the confidential courtesy and smoothness of his manner and his voice.

"'Charmed to see you again," said the doctor, looking about him a little anxiously, and producing his card-case in a very precipitate manner. 'But my dear Miss Gwilt, permit me to rectify a slight mistake on your part. Doctor Downward of Pimlico is dead and buried; and you will infinitely oblige me if you will never, on any consideration, mention him again!'

"I took the card he offered me, and discovered that I was now supposed to be speaking to 'Doctor Le Doux, of the Sanatorium, Fairweather Vale, Hampstead!'

"'You seem to have found it necessary,' I said, 'to change a great many things since I last saw you? Your name, your residence, your personal appearance——?'

"'And my branch of practice,' interposed the doctor. 'I have purchased of the original possessor (a person of feeble enterprise and no resources) a name, a diploma, and a partially completed sanatorium for the reception of nervous invalids. We are open already to the inspection of a few privileged friends—come and see us. Are you walking my way? Pray take my arm, and tell me to what happy chance I am indebted for the pleasure of seeing you again?'

"I told him the circumstances exactly as they had happened, and I added (with a view to making sure of his relations with his former ally at Pimlico) that I had been greatly surprised to hear Mrs. Oldershaw's door shut on such an old friend as himself. Cautious as he was, the doctor's manner

of receiving my remark satisfied me at once that my suspicions of an estrangement were well founded. His smile vanished, and he settled his hideous spectacles irritably on the bridge of his nose.

"'Pardon me if I leave you to draw your own conclusions,' he said. 'The subject of Mrs. Oldershaw is, I regret to say, far from agreeable to me under existing circumstances. A business difficulty connected with our late partnership at Pimlico, entirely without interest for a young and brilliant woman like yourself. Tell me your news! Have you left your situation at Thorpe-Ambrose? Are you residing in London? Is there anything, professional or otherwise, that I can do for you?'

"That last question was a more important one than he supposed. Before I answered it, I felt the necessity of parting company with him and of getting a little time to think.

"'You have kindly asked me, doctor, to pay you a visit,' I said. 'In your quiet house at Hampstead, I may possibly have something to say to you which I can't say in this noisy street. When are you at home at the sanatorium? Should I find you there later in the day?'

"The doctor assured me that he was then on his way back, and begged that I would name my own hour. I said, 'Towards the afternoon'; and, pleading an engagement, hailed the first omnibus that passed us. 'Don't forget the address,' said the doctor, as he handed me in. 'I have got your card,' I answered—and so we parted.

"I returned to the hotel, and went up into my room, and thought over it very anxiously.

"The serious obstacle of the signature on the marriage register still stood in my way as unmanageably as ever. All hope of getting assistance from Mrs. Oldershaw was at an end. I could only regard her henceforth as an enemy hidden in the dark—the enemy, beyond all doubt now, who had had me followed and watched when I was last in London. To what other counsellor could I turn for the advice which my unlucky ignorance of law and business obliged me to seek from some one more experienced than myself? Could I go to the lawyer whom I consulted when I was about to marry Midwinter in my maiden name? Impossible! To say nothing of his cold reception of me when I had last seen him, the advice I wanted this time, related (disguise the facts as I might) to the commission of a fraud—a fraud of the sort that no prosperous lawyer would consent to assist, if he had a

character to lose. Was there any other competent person I could think of? There was one, and one only—the doctor who had died at Pimlico, and had revived again at Hampstead.

"It was two o'clock before I finally decided on paying the doctor a visit. Having, after this, occupied nearly another hour in determining to a hair's breadth how far I should take him into my confidence, I sent for a cab at last, and set off towards three in the afternoon for Hampstead.

"I found the sanatorium with some little difficulty.

"Fairweather Vale proved to be a new neighbourhood, situated below the high ground of Hampstead, on the southern side. The day was overcast, and the place looked very dreary. We approached it by a new road running between trees, which might once have been the park-avenue of a country house. At the end we came upon a wilderness of open ground, with half-finished villas dotted about, and a hideous litter of boards, wheelbarrows, and building materials of all sorts scattered in every direction. At one corner of this scene of desolation stood a great overgrown dismal house, plastered with drab-coloured stucco, and surrounded by a naked unfinished garden, without a shrub or a flower in it—frightful to behold. On the open iron gate that led into this enclosure was a new brass plate, with 'Sanatorium' inscribed on it in great black letters. The bell, when the cabman rang it, pealed through the empty house like a knell; and the pallid withered old manservant in black, who answered the door, looked as if he had stepped up out of his grave to perform that service. He let out on me a smell of damp plaster and new varnish; and he let in with me a chilling draught of the damp November air. I didn't notice it at the time—but writing of it now, I remember that I shivered as I crossed the threshold.

"I gave my naame to the servant as 'Mrs. Armadale,' and was shown into the waiting-room. The very fire itself was dying of damp in the grate. The only books on the table were the doctor's Works, in sober drab covers; and the only object that ornamented the walls was the foreign Diploma (handsomely framed and glazed), of which the doctor had possessed himself by purchase, along with the foreign name.

"After a moment or two, the proprietor of the Sanatorium came in and held up his hands in cheerful astonishment at the sight of me.

"'I hadn't an idea who "Mrs. Armadale" was!' he said. "My dear lady, have *you* changed your name, too? How sly of you not to tell me when we met this morning!

Come into my private snuggery—I can't think of keeping an old and dear friend like you in the patients' waiting-room.'

"The doctor's private snuggery was at the back of the house, looking out on fields and trees, doomed but not yet destroyed by the builder. Horrible objects in brass and leather and glass, twisted and turned as if they were sentient things writhing in agonies of pain, filled up one end of the room. A great book-case with glass doors extended over the whole of the opposite wall, and exhibited on its shelves long rows of glass jars, in which shapeless dead creatures of a dull white colour floated in yellow liquid. Above the fire-place hung a collection of photographic portraits of men and women, enclosed in two large frames hanging side by side with a space between them. The left-hand frame illustrated the effects of nervous suffering as seen in the face; the right-hand frame exhibited the ravages of insanity from the same point of view; while the space between was occupied by an elegantly-illuminated scroll, bearing inscribed on it the time-honoured motto, 'Prevention is better than Cure.'

"'Here I am, with my galvanic apparatus, and my preserved specimens, and all the rest of it,' said the doctor, placing me in a chair by the fireside. 'And there is my System mutely addressing you just above your head, under a form of exposition which I venture to describe as frankness itself. This is no madhouse, my dear lady. Let other men treat insanity, if they like—*I* stop it! No patients in the house as yet. But we live in an age when nervous derangement (parent of insanity) is steadily on the increase; and in due time the sufferers will come. I can wait, as Harvey waited, as Jenner waited. And now, do put your feet up on the fender, and tell me about yourself. You are married, of course? And what a pretty name! Accept my best and most heartfelt congratulations. You have the two greatest blessings that can fall to a woman's lot; the two capital H's, as I call them—Husband and Home.'

"I interrupted the genial flow of the doctor's congratulations at the first opportunity.

"'I am married; but the circumstances are by no means of the ordinary kind,' I said seriously. 'My present position includes none of the blessings that are usually supposed to fall to a woman's lot. I am already in a situation of very serious difficulty—and before long I may be in a situation of very serious danger as well.'

"The doctor drew his chair a little nearer to me, and fell at

once into his old professional manner and his old confidential tone.

"'If you wish to consult me,' he said softly, 'you know that I have kept some dangerous secrets in my time, and you also know that I possess two valuable qualities as an adviser. I am not easily shocked; and I can be implicitly trusted.'

"'Just as you please, you know,' added the doctor, 'I never invite confidences. I merely receive them.'

"There was no help for it; I had come there not to hesitate, but to speak. I risked it, and spoke.

"'The matter on which I wish to consult you,' I said, 'is not (as you seem to think) within your experience as a professional man. But I believe you may be of assistance to me, if I trust myself to your larger experience as a man of the world. I warn you, beforehand, that I shall certainly surprise and possibly alarm you before I have done.'

"With that preface, I entered on my story, telling him what I had settled to tell him—and no more.

"*November 24th.*—The doctor has agreed to help me, as I supposed—but on terms which I never anticipated. The condition on which I have secured his services amounts to nothing less than the payment to him, on my stepping into the place of Armadale's widow, of half my first year's income—in other words, six hundred pounds!

"I protested against this extortionate demand in every way I could think of. All to no purpose. The doctor met me with the most engaging frankness. Nothing, he said, but the accidental embarrassment of his position at the present time would have induced him to mix himself up in the matter at all. He would honestly confess that he had exhausted his own resources, and the resources of other persons whom he described as his 'backers,' in the purchase and completion of the Sanatorium. Under those circumstances, six hundred pounds in prospect *was* an object to him. For that sum he would run the serious risk of advising and assisting me. Not a farthing less would tempt him—and there he left it, with his best and friendliest wishes, in my hands!

"It ended in the only way in which it could end. I had no choice but to accept the terms, and to let the doctor settle things on the spot as he pleased. The arrangement once made between us, I must do him the justice to say that he showed no disposition to let the grass grow under his feet. He

called briskly for pen, ink, and paper, and suggested opening the campaign at Thorpe-Ambrose by to-night's post.

"We agreed on a form of letter which I wrote, and which he copied on the spot. I entered into no particulars at starting. I simply asserted that I was the widow of the deceased Mr. Armadale; that I had been privately married to him; that I had returned to England on his sailing in the yacht from Naples; and that I begged to enclose a copy of my marriage-certificate, as a matter of form with which I presumed it was customary to comply. The letter was addressed to 'The representatives of the late Allan Armadale, Esq., Thorpe-Ambrose, Norfolk.' And the doctor himself carried it away, and put it in the post.

"*November 25th.*—At two o'clock to-day the doctor called again by appointment. He has been to his lawyers (of course without taking them into our confidence) to put the case simply of proving my marriage. The result confirms what he has already told me. The pivot on which the whole matter will turn, if my claim is disputed, will be the question of identity; and it may be necessary for the witness to make his Declaration in the magistrates' presence before the week is out.

"In this position of affairs, the doctor thinks it important that we should be within easy reach of each other, and proposes to find a quiet lodging for me in his neighbourhood. I am quite willing to go anywhere—for, among the other strange fancies that have got possession of me, I have an idea that I shall feel more completely lost to Midwinter if I move out of the neighbourhood in which his letters are addressed to me. I was awake and thinking of him again last night. This morning I have finally decided to write to him no more.

"After staying half an hour, the doctor left me—having first inquired whether I would like to accompany him to Hampstead to look for lodgings. I informed him that I had some business of my own which would keep me in London. He inquired what the business was. 'You will see,' I said, 'to-morrow or next day.'

"I had a moment's nervous trembling when I was by myself again. My business in London, besides being a serious business in a woman's eyes, took my mind back to Midwinter in spite of me. The prospect of removing to my new lodging had reminded me of the necessity of dressing in my new character. The time had come now for *getting my widow's weeds.*

"I found a surprise in store for me on my return to the hotel. An elderly gentleman was announced to be waiting to see me. I opened my sitting-room door—and there was old Bashwood!

"He had got my letter that morning, and had started for London by the next train to answer it in person. I had expected a great deal from him, but I had certainly not expected *that*. It flattered me. For the moment, I declare it flattered me!

"I pass over the wretched old creature's raptures and reproaches, and groans and tears, and weary long prosings about the lonely months he had passed at Thorpe-Ambrose, brooding over my desertion of him. He was quite eloquent at times—but I don't want his eloquence here. It is needless to say that I put myself right with him, and consulted his feelings before I asked him for his news. What a blessing a woman's vanity is sometimes! I almost forgot my risks and responsibilities, in my anxiety to be charming. For a minute or two, I felt a warm little flutter of triumph. And it *was* a triumph—even with an old man! In a quarter of an hour, I had him smirking and smiling, hanging on my lightest words in an ecstasy, and answering all the questions I put to him, like a good little child.

"Here is his account of affairs at Thorpe-Ambrose, as I gently extracted it from him bit by bit:—

"In the first place, the news of Armadale's death has reached Miss Milroy. It has so completely overwhelmed her that her father has been compelled to remove her from the school. She is back at the cottage, and the doctor is in daily attendance. Do I pity her? Yes! I pity her exactly as much as she once pitied me!

"In the next place, the state of affairs at the great house, which I expected to find some difficulty in comprehending, turns out to be quite intelligible, and certainly not discouraging so far. Only yesterday, the lawyers on both sides came to an understanding. Mr. Darch (the family solicitor of the Blanchards, and Armadale's bitter enemy in past times) represents the interests of Miss Blanchard, who (in the absence of any male heir) is next heir to the estate, and who has, it appears, been in London for some time past. Mr. Smart, of Norwich (originally employed to overlook Bashwood), represents the deceased Armadale. And this is what the two lawyers have settled between them.

"Mr. Darch, acting for Miss Blanchard, has claimed the

possession of the estate and the right of receiving the rents at the Christmas audit, in her name. Mr. Smart, on his side, has admitted that there is great weight in the family solicitor's application. He cannot see his way, as things are now, to contesting the question of Armadale's death, and he will consent to offer no resistance to the application, if Mr. Darch will consent, on his side, to assume the responsibility of taking possession in Miss Blanchard's name. This Mr. Darch has already done; and the estate is now virtually in Miss Blanchard's possession.

"So much for what old Bashwood had to tell me. Having recovered my influence over him, and possessed myself of all his information so far, the next thing to consider was the right use to turn him to in the future. He was entirely at my disposal, for his place at the steward's office has been already taken by Miss Blanchard's man of business, and he pleaded hard to be allowed to stay and serve my interests in London. There would not have been the least danger letting him stay, for I had, as a matter of course, left him undisturbed in his conviction that I really am the widow of Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose. But with the doctor's resources at my command, I wanted no assistance of any sort in London; and it occurred to me that I might make Bashwood more useful by sending him back to Norfolk to watch events there in my interests.

"*November 26th.*—The answer has arrived this morning, in the form (as Bashwood supposed) of a letter from Mr. Darch. The crabbed old lawyer acknowledges my letter in three lines. Before he takes any steps, or expresses any opinion on the subject, he wants evidence of identity as well as the evidence of the certificate; and he ventures to suggest that it may be desirable, before we go any further, to refer him to my legal advisers.

"*Two o'clock.*—The doctor called shortly after twelve to say that he had found a lodging for me within twenty minutes' walk of the Sanatorium. In return for his news, I showed him Mr. Darch's letter. He took it away at once to his lawyers, and came back with the necessary information for my guidance. I have answered Mr. Darch by sending him the address of my legal advisers—otherwise the doctor's lawyers—without making any comment on the desire that he has expressed for additional evidence of the marriage. This

is all that can be done to-day. To-morrow will bring with it events of greater interest—for to-morrow the doctor is to make his Declaration before the magistrate, and to-morrow I am to move to my new lodging in my widow's weeds.

"*November 27th.*— *Fairweather Vale Villas.*—The Declaration has been made, with all the necessary formalities. And I have taken possession, in my widow's costume, of my new rooms

"I ought to be excited by the opening of this new act in the drama, and by the venturesome part that I am playing in it myself. Strange to say, I am quiet and depressed. The thought of Midwinter has followed me to my new abode, and is pressing on me heavily at this moment. I have no fear of any accident happening, in the interval that must still pass before I step publicly into the place of Armadale's widow. But when that time comes, and when Midwinter finds me (as sooner or later find me he must!) figuring in my false character, and settled in the position that I have usurped—*then,* I ask myself, What will happen? The answer still comes as it first came to me this morning, when I put on my widow's dress. Now, as then, the presentiment is fixed in my mind that he will kill me. If it was not too late to draw back——Absurd! I shall shut up my journal.

"*Ten, at night.*—Bashwood has just paid me a visit. Towards four in the afternoon I was startled to hear a cab drive up to the door. I went to the window, and got there just in time to see old Bashwood getting out with an activity of which I should never have supposed him capable. So little did I anticipate the tremendous discovery that was going to burst on me in another minute, that I turned to the glass, and wondered what the susceptible old gentleman would say to me in my widow's cap.

"The instant he entered the room, I saw that some serious disaster had happened. His eyes were wild, his wig was awry. He approached me with a strange mixture of eagerness and dismay. 'I've done as you told me,' he whispered breathlessly. 'I've held my tongue about it and came straight to *you*!' He caught me by the hand before I could speak, with a boldness quite new in my experience of him. 'Oh, how can I break it to you!' he burst out. 'I'm beside myself when I think of it!'

"'When you *can* speak,' I said, putting him into a chair,

'speak out. I see in your face that you bring me news I don't look for from Thorpe-Ambrose.'

"He put his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat, and drew out a letter. He looked at the letter, and looked at me. 'New-new-news you don't look for,' he stammered; 'but not from Thorpe-Ambrose!'

"'Not from Thorpe-Ambrose!'

"'No. From the sea!'

"The first dawning of the truth broke on me at those words. I couldn't speak—I could only hold out my hand to him for the letter.

"Fiume, Illyria, November 21st, 1851.

MR. BASHWOOD,

"The address I date from will surprise you—and you will be more surprised still when you hear how it is that I come to write to you from a port on the Adriatic Sea.

"I have been the victim of a rascally attempt at robbery and murder. The robbery has succeeded; and it is only through the mercy of God that the murder did not succeed too.

"I hired a yacht rather more than a month ago at Naples; and sailed (I am glad to think now) without any friend with me, for Messina. From Messina I went for a cruise in the Adriatic. Two days out, we were caught in a storm. Storms get up in a hurry, and go down in a hurry, in those parts. The vessel behaved nobly—I declare I feel the tears in my eyes now, when I think of her at the bottom of the sea! Towards sunset it began to moderate; and by midnight, except for a long smooth swell, the sea was as quiet as need be. I went below, a little tired (having helped in working the yacht while the gale lasted), and fell asleep in five minutes. About two hours after, I was woke by something falling into my cabin through a chink of the ventilator in the upper part of the door. I jumped up, and found a bit of paper with a key wrapped in it, and with writing on the inner side, in a hand which it was not very easy to read.

"Up to this time I had not had the ghost of a suspicion that I was alone at sea with a gang of murderous vagabonds (excepting one only) who would stick at nothing. I had got on very well with my sailing-master (the worst scoundrel of the lot), and better still with his English mate. The sailors

being all foreigners, I had very little to say to. They did their work, and no quarrels and nothing unpleasant happened. If anybody had told me, before I went to bed on the night after the storm, that the sailing-master and the crew and the mate (who had been no better than the rest of them at starting) were all in a conspiracy to rob me of the money I had on board, and then to drown me in my own vessel afterwards, I should have laughed in his face. Just remember that; and then fancy for yourself (for I'm sure I can't tell you) what I must have thought when I opened the paper round the key, and read what I now copy (from the mate's writing) as follows:—

"'Sir,—Stay in your bed till you hear a boat shove off from the starboard side—or you are a dead man. Your money is stolen; and in five minutes' time the yacht will be scuttled, and the cabin-hatch will be nailed down on you. Dead men tell no tales—and the sailing-master's notion is to leave proofs afloat that the vessel has foundered with all on board. It was his doing to begin with, and we were all in it. I can't find it in my heart not to give you a chance for your life. It's a bad chance, but I can do no more. I should be murdered myself if I didn't seem to go with the rest. The key of your cabin-door is thrown back to you, inside this. Don't be alarmed when you hear the hammer above. I shall do it, and I shall have short nails in my hand as well as long, and use the short ones only. Wait till you hear the boat with all of us shove off, and then prize up the cabin-hatch with your back. The vessel will float a quarter of an hour after the holes are bored in her. Slip into the sea on the port side, and keep the vessel between you and the boat. You will find plenty of loose lumber, wrenched away on purpose, drifting about to hold on by. It's a fine night and a smooth sea, and there's a chance that a ship may pick you up while there's life left in you. I can do no more.—Yours truly, J.M.'

"As I came to those last words, I heard the hammering down of the hatch over my head. I don't suppose I'm more of a coward than most people—but there was a moment when the sweat poured down me like rain. I got to be my own man again, before the hammering was done, and found myself thinking of somebody very dear to me in England. I said to myself, 'I'll have a try for my life, for her sake, though the chances are dead against me.'

"I put a letter from that person I have mentioned into one of the stoppered bottles on my dressing-case—along with the mate's warning, in case I lived to see him again. I hung this, and a flask of whisky, in a sling round my neck—and, after first dressing myself in my confusion, thought better of it, and stripped again, for swimming, to my shirt and drawers. By the time I had done that, the hammering was over, and there was such a silence that I could hear the water bubbling into the scuttled vessel amidships. The next noise was the noise of the boat and the villains in her (always excepting my friend the mate) shoving off from the starboard side. I waited for the splash of the oars in the water, and then got my back under the hatch. The mate had kept his promise. I lifted it easily—crept across the deck, under cover of the bulwarks, on all fours—and slipped into the sea on the port side. Lots of things were floating about. I took the first thing I came to—a hencoop—and swam away with it about a couple of hundred yards, keeping the yacht between me and the boat. Having got that distance, I was seized with a shivering fit, and I stopped (fearing the cramp next) to take a pull at my flask. When I had closed the flask again, I turned for a moment to look back, and saw the yacht in the act of sinking. In a minute more there was nothing between me and the boat, but pieces of wreck that had been purposely thrown out to float. The moon was shining; and, if they had had a glass in the boat, I believe they might have seen my head, though I carefully kept the hencoop between me and them.

"As it was, they laid on their oars; and I heard loud voices among them disputing. After what seemed an age to me, I discovered what the dispute was about. The boat's head was suddenly turned my way. Some cleverer scoundrel than the rest (the sailing-master, I daresay,) had evidently persuaded them to row back over the place where the yacht had gone down, and make quite sure that I had gone down with her.

"They were more than half way across the distance that separated us, and I had given myself up for lost, when I heard a cry from one of them, and saw the boat's progress suddenly checked. In a minute or two more, the boat's head was turned again; and they rowed straight away from me like men rowing for their lives.

"I looked on one side, towards the land, and saw nothing. I looked on the other, towards the sea, and discovered what the boat's crew had discovered before me—a sail in the dis-

tance, growing steadily brighter and bigger in the moonlight the longer I looked at it. In a quarter of an hour more the vessel was within hail of me, and the crew had got me on board.

Some false report of my being drowned may, in that case, have reached England. If this has happened (which I hope to God may be an unfounded fear on my part), go directly to Major Milroy at the cottage. Show him this letter—I have written it quite as much for his eye as for yours—and then give him the enclosed note, and ask him if he doesn't think the circumstances justify me in hoping he will send it to Miss Milroy. I can't explain why I don't write directly to the major, or to Miss Milroy, instead of to you. I can only say there are considerations I am bound in honour to respect, which oblige me to act in this round-about way.

"I don't ask you to answer this—for I shall be on my way home, I hope, long before your letter could reach me in this out-of-the-way place. Whatever you do, don't lose a moment in going to Major Milroy. Go, on second thoughts, whether the loss of the yacht is known in England or not.

"Yours truly,

"ALLAN ARMADALE."

"I looked up when I had come to the end of the letter, and saw, for the first time, that Bashwood had left his chair, and had placed himself opposite to me. He was intently studying my face, with the inquiring expression of a man who was trying to read my thoughts. His eyes fell guiltily when they met mine, and he shrank away to his chair. Believing, as he did, that I was really married to Armadale, was he trying to discover whether the news of Armadale's rescue from the sea was good news or bad news, in my estimation. It was no time then for entering into explanations with him. The first thing to be done was to communicate instantly with the doctor. I called Bashwood back to me, and gave him my hand.

"'You have done me a service,' I said, 'which makes us closer friends than ever. I shall say more about this, and about other matters of some interest to both of us, later in the day. I want you now to lend me Mr. Armadale's letter (which I promise to bring back) and to wait here till I return. Will you do that for me, Mr. Bashwood?'

"He would do anything I asked him, he said. I went into the bedroom, and put on my bonnet and shawl.

"When I went back to the Sanatorium, I was informed that the doctor had returned half-an-hour since, and that he was in his room anxiously waiting to see me.

"I went into the study, and found him sitting close by the fire with his head down, and his hands on his knees. On the table near him, besides Armadale's letter and my note, I saw, in the little circle of light thrown by the reading-lamp, an open railway guide. Was he meditating flight? It was impossible to tell from his face, when he looked up at me, what he was meditating, or how the shock had struck him when he first discovered that Armadale was a living man.

"'Take a seat near the fire,' he said. 'It's very raw and cold to-day.'

'I took a chair in silence. In silence, on his side, the doctor sat rubbing his knees before the fire.

"'Have you nothing to say to me?' I asked.

"He rose, and suddenly removed the shade from the reading-lamp, so that the light fell on my face.

"'You are not looking well,' he said. 'What's the matter?'

"'My head feels dull, and my eyes are heavy and hot,' I replied. 'The weather,' I suppose.'

"It was strange how we both got farther and farther from the one vitally important subject which we had both come together to discuss!

"I think a cup of tea would do you good,' remarked the doctor.

"I accepted his suggestion; and he ordered the tea. While it was coming, he walked up and down the room, and I sat by the fire—and not a word passed between us on either side.

"The tea revived me; and the doctor noticed a change for the better in my face. He sat down opposite to me at the table, and spoke out at last.

"'If I had ten thousand pounds at this moment,' he began, 'I would give the whole of it never to have compromised myself in your desperate speculation on Mr. Armadale's death!'

"He said those words with an abruptness, almost with a violence which was strangely uncharacteristic of his ordinary manner. Was he frightened himself, or was he trying to frighten me? I determined to make him explain himself

at the outset, so far as I was concerned. 'Wait a moment, doctor,' I said. 'Do you hold me responsible for what has happened?'

"'Certainly not,' he replied, stiffly. 'Neither you nor anybody could have foreseen what has happened. When I say I would give ten thousand pounds to be out of this business, I am blaming noboby but myself. And when I tell you next, that I, for one, won't allow Mr. Armadale's resurrection from the sea to be the ruin of me without a fight for it, I tell you, my dear madam, one of the plainest truths I ever told to man or woman, in the whole course of my life. Don't suppose I am invidiously separating my interests from yours, in the common danger that now threatens us both. I simply indicate the difference in the risk that we have respectively run. *You* have not sunk the whole of your resources in establishing a Sanatorium; and *you* have not made a false declaration before a magistrate, which is punishable as perjury by the law.'

"I interrupted him again. His selfishness did me more good than his tea—it roused my temper effectually. 'Suppose we let your risk and my risk alone, and come to the point,' I said. 'What do you mean by making a fight for it? I see a railway guide on your table. Does making a fight for it, mean—running away?'

"'Running away?' repeated the doctor. 'You appear to forget that every farthing I have in the world is embarked in this establishment.'

"'You stop here then?' I said.

"'Unquestionably!'

"'And what do you mean to do when Mr. Armadale comes to England?'

"A solitary fly, the last of his race whom the winter had spared, was buzzing feebly about the doctor's face. He caught it before he answered me, and held it out across the table in his closed hand.

"'If this fly's name was Armadale,' he said, 'and if you had got him as I have got him now, what would *you* do?'

"His eyes, fixed on my face up to this time, turned significantly, as he ended this question, to my widow's dress. I, too, looked at it, when he looked. A thrill of the old deadly hatred and the old deadly determination, ran through me again.

"'I should kill him,' I said.

"The doctor started to his feet (with the fly still in his

hand), and looked at me—a little too theatrically—with an expression of the utmost horror.

"'Kill him!' repeated the doctor in a paroxysm of virtuous alarm. 'Violence—murderous violence—in my Sanatorium! You take my breath away!'

"I caught his eye, while he was expressing himself in this elaborately indignant manner, scrutinising me with a searching curiosity which was, to say the least of it, a little at variance with the vehemence of his language and the warmth of his tone. He laughed uneasily, when our eyes met, and recovered his smoothly confidential manner in the instant that elapsed before he spoke again.

"'I beg a thousand pardons,' he said. 'I ought to have known better than to take a lady too literally at her word. Permit me to remind you, however, that the circumstances are too serious for anything in the nature of—let us say, an exaggeration or a joke. You shall hear what I propose, without further preface.' He paused, and resumed his figurative use of the fly imprisoned in his hand. 'Here is Mr. Armadale. I can let him out, or keep him in, just as I please—and he knows it. I say to him,' continued the doctor, facetiously addressing the fly, 'Give me proper security, Mr. Armadale, that no proceedings of any sort shall be taken against either this lady or myself, and I will let you out of the hollow of my hand. Refuse—and be the risk what it may, I will keep you in. Can you doubt, my dear madam, what Mr. Armadale's answer is, sooner or later, certain to be? Can you doubt,' said the doctor, suiting the action to the word, and letting the fly go, 'that it will end to the entire satisfaction of all parties, in this way?'

"'I won't say at present,' I answered; 'whether I doubt or not. Let me make sure that I understand you first. You propose, if I am not mistaken, to shut the doors of this place on Mr. Armadale, and not to let him out again, until he has agreed to the terms which it is our interest to impose on him? May I ask, in that case, how you mean to make him walk into the trap that you have set for him here?'

"'I propose,' said the doctor, with his hand on the railway guide, 'ascertaining first, at what time during every evening of this month the tidal trains from Dover and Folkestone reach the London Bridge terminus. And I propose next, posting a person whom Mr. Armadale knows, and whom you and I can trust, to wait the arrival of the trains, and to meet our man at the moment when he steps out of the railway carriage.'

"'Have you thought,' I inquired, 'of who the person is to be?'

"'I have thought,' said the doctor, taking up Armadale's letter, 'of the person to whom this letter is addressed.'

"At that point in the interrogatory, the doctor's eyes began to look at me distrustfully, behind the doctor's spectacles.

"'What is the secret of this blind devotion of Mr. Bashwood's to your interests?' he asked.

"I hesitated for a moment—in pity to Bashwood, not in pity to myself. 'If you must know,' I answered, 'Mr. Bashwood is in love with me.'

"'Ay! ay!' exclaimed the doctor, with an air of relief. 'I begin to understand now. Is he a young man?'

"'He is an old man.'

"The doctor laid himself back in his chair, and chuckled softly. 'Better and better!' he said. 'Here is the very man we want. Who so fit as Mr. Armadale's steward to meet Mr. Armadale on his return to London? And who so capable of influencing Mr. Bashwood in the proper way as the charming object of Mr. Bashwood's admiration?'

"There could be no doubt that Bashwood was the man to serve the doctor's purpose, and that my influence was to be trusted to make him serve it. The difficulty was not here—the difficulty was in the unanswered question that I had put to the doctor a minute since. I put it to him again.

"'Suppose Mr. Armadale's steward meets his employer at the terminus,' I said; 'may I ask once more how Mr. Armadale is to be persuaded to come here?'

"'Don't think me ungallant,' rejoined the doctor in his gentlest manner, 'if I ask, on my side, how are men persuaded to do nine-tenths of the foolish acts of their lives? They are persuaded by your charming sex. The weak side of every man is the woman's side of him. We have only to discover the woman's side of Mr. Armadale—to tickle him on it gently—and to lead him our way with a silken string. I observe here,' pursued the doctor, opening Armadale's letter, 'a reference to a certain young lady, which looks promising. Where is the note that Mr. Armadale speaks of as addressed to Miss Milroy?'

"'Never mind the note,' I said. 'It's burnt, for fear of accidents. I can tell you all (and more) than the note could have told you. Miss Milroy cuts the knot! Miss Milroy ends the difficulty! She is privately engaged to him. She

has heard the false report of his death; and she has been seriously ill at Thorpe-Ambrose ever since. When Bashwood meets him at the station, the very first question he is certain to ask——'

"'I see!' exclaimed the doctor, anticipating me. 'Mr. Bashwood has nothing to do but to help the truth with a touch of fiction. When he tells his master that the false report has reached Miss Milroy, he has only to add that the shock has affected her head, and that she is here under medical care. Perfect! perfect! We shall have him at the Sanatorium as fast as the fastest cabhorse in London can bring him to us. And mind! no risk—no necessity for trusting other people. This is not a madhouse; this is not a Licensed Establishment—no doctors' certificates are necessary here! My dear lady, I congratulate you; I congratulate myself. Permit me to hand you the railway guide, with my best compliments to Mr. Bashwood, and with the page turned down for him, as an additional attention, at the right place.'"

BOOK THE LAST

CHAPTER I

AT THE TERMINUS

On the night of the second of December, Mr. Bashwood took up his post of observation at the terminus of the South Eastern Railway for the first time. It was an earlier date, by six days, than that date which Allan had himself fixed for his return. But the doctor, taking counsel of his medical experience, had considered it just probable that "Mr. Armadale might be perverse enough, at his enviable age, to recover sooner than his medical advisers might have anticipated." For caution's sake, therefore, Mr. Bashwood was instructed to begin watching the arrival of the tidal trains, on the day after he had received his employer's letter.

From the second to the seventh of December, the steward waited punctually on the platform, saw the trains come in, and satisfied himself, evening after evening, that the travellers were all strangers to him. From the second to the seventh of December, Miss Gwilt (to return to the name under which she is best known in these pages) received his daily report, sometimes delivered personally, sometimes sent by letter. The doctor, to whom the reports were communicated, received them in his turn with unabated confidence in the precautions that had been adopted, up to the morning of the eighth. On that date, the irritation of continued suspense had produced a change for the worse in Miss Gwilt's variable temper, which was perceptible to every one about her, and which, strangely enough, was reflected by an equally marked change in the doctor's manner when he came to pay his usual visit. By a coincidence so extraordinary, that his enemies might have suspected it of not being a coincidence at all, the morning on which Miss Gwilt lost her patience, proved to be also the morning on which the doctor lost his confidence for the first time.

"No news, of course," he said, sitting down with a heavy sigh. "Well! well!"

Miss Gwilt looked up at him irritably, from her work.

"You seem strangely depressed this morning," she said. "What are you afraid of now?"

"The imputation of being afraid, madam," answered the doctor solemnly, "is not an imputation to cast rashly on any man—even when he belongs to such an essentially peaceful profession as mine. I am not afraid. I am (as you more correctly put it in the first instance) strangely depressed. My nature is, as you know, naturally sanguine, and I only see to-day, what, but for my habitual hopefulness, I might have seen, and ought to have seen, a week since."

Miss Gwilt impatiently threw down her work. "If words cost money," she said, "the luxury of talking would be rather an expensive luxury, in your case!"

The doctor came behind her, and put his hand on the back of her chair.

"I have a question to ask, in the first place," he said; "and a measure of necessary precaution to suggest in the second. If you will honour me with your attention, I will put the question first.

"I am listening."

"You know that Mr. Armadale is alive," pursued the doctor; "and you know that he is coming back to England. Why do you continue to wear your widow's dress?"

She answered him without an instant's hesitation, steadily going on with her work.

"Because I am of a sanguine disposition, like you. I mean to trust to the chapter of accidents to the very last. Mr. Armadale may die yet, on his way home."

"And suppose he gets home alive—what then?"

"Then there is another chance still left."

"What is it, pray?"

"He may die in your sanatorium."

"Madam!" remonstrated the doctor in the deep bass which he reserved for his outbursts of virtuous indignation. "Wait! you spoke of the chapter of accidents," he resumed, gliding back into his softer conversational tones. "Yes! yes! of course. I understand you this time. Even the healing art is at the mercy of accidents—even such a sanatorium as mine is liable to be surprised by Death. Just so! just so!" said the doctor, conceding the question with the utmost impartiality. "There *is* the chapter of accidents, I admit—if you choose to trust to it. Mind! I say emphatically, *if* you choose to trust to it."

There was another moment of silence—silence so profound that nothing was audible in the room but the rapid *click* of Miss Gwilt's needle through her work.

"Go on," she said; "you haven't done yet."

"True!" said the doctor. "Having put my question, I have my measure of precaution to impress on you next. You will see, my dear madam, that I am not disposed to trust to the chapter of accidents on my side. Reflection has convinced me that you and I are not (locally speaking) so conveniently situated as we might be, in case of emergency. Cabs are, as yet, rare in this rapidly-improving neighbourhood. I am twenty minutes' walk from you; you are twenty minutes' walk from me. I know nothing of Mr. Armadale's character; you know it well. It might be necessary—vitally necessary—to appeal to your superior knowledge of him at a moment's notice. And how am I to do that unless we are within easy reach of each other, under the same roof? In both our interests, I beg to invite you, my dear madam, to become for a limited period an inmate of My Sanatorium."

Miss Gwilt's rapid needle suddenly stopped. "I understand you," she said again, as quietly as before.

"I beg your pardon," said the doctor, with another attack of deafness, and with his hand once more at his ear.

She laughed to herself—a low, terrible laugh, which startled even the doctor into taking his hand off the back of her chair.

"An inmate of your sanatorium?" she repeated. "You consult appearances in everything else—do you propose to consult appearances in receiving me into your house?"

"Most assuredly!" replied the doctor, with enthusiasm. "I am surprised at your asking me the question! Did you ever know a man of any eminence in my profession who set appearances at defiance? If you honour me by accepting my invitation, you enter My Sanatorium in the most unimpeachable of all possible characters—in the character of a Patient."

"When do you want my answer?"

"Can you decide to-day?"

"No."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes. Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing more."

"Leave me then. *I* don't keep up appearances. I wish to be alone—and I say so. Good morning."

At a quarter to eight o'clock that night, Mr. Bashwood

took up his post of observation as usual on the platform of the terminus at London Bridge. He was in the highest good spirits; he smiled and smirked in irrepressible exultation. The sense that he held in reserve a means of influence over Miss Gwilt, in virtue of his knowledge of her past career, had had no share in effecting the transformation that now appeared in him. It had upheld his courage in his forlorn life at Thorpe-Ambrose, and it had given him that increased confidence of manner which Miss Gwilt herself had noticed; but, from the moment when he had regained his old place in her favour, it had vanished as a motive power in him, annihilated by the electric shock of her touch and her look. His vanity—the vanity which in men at his age is only despair in disguise—had now lifted him to the seventh heaven of fatuous happiness once more. He believed in her again as he believed in the smart new winter overcoat that he wore—as he believed in the dainty little cane (appropriate to the dawning dandyism of lads in their teens) that he flourishd in his hand. He hummed! The worn-out old creature who had not sung since his childhood, hummed as he paced the platform the few fragments he could remember of a worn-out old song.

The train was due as early as eight o'clock that night. At five minutes past the hour, the whistle sounded. In less than five minutes more, the passengers were getting out on the platform.

Following the instructions that had been given to him, Mr. Bashwood made his way as well as the crowd would let him, along the line of carriages; and discovering no familiar face on that first investigation, joined the passengers for a second search among them in the custom-house waiting-room next.

He had looked round the room, and had satisfied himself that the persons occupying it were all strangers, when he heard a voice behind him, exclaiming, "Can that be Mr. Bashwood!"

He turned in eager expectation; and found himself face to face with the last man under heaven whom he had expected to see.

The man was MIDWINTER.

CHAPTER II

IN THE HOUSE

Noticing Mr. Bashwood's confusion (after a moment's glance at the change in his personal appearance), Midwinter spoke first.

"I see I have surprised you," he said. "You were looking, I suppose, for somebody else? Have you heard from Allan? Is he on his way home again already?"

The inquiry about Allan, though it would naturally have suggested itself to any one in Midwinter's position at that moment, added to Mr. Bashwood's confusion. Not knowing how else to extricate himself from the critical position in which he was placed, he took refuge in simple denial.

"I know nothing about Mr. Armadale—oh dear, no, sir, I know nothing about Mr. Armadale," he answered with needless eagerness and hurry. "Welcome back to England, sir," he went on, changing the subject in his nervously talkative manner. "I didn't know you had been abroad. It's so long since we have had the pleasure—since I have had the pleasure. —Have you enjoyed yourself, sir, in foreign parts? Such different manners from ours—yes, yes, yes—such different manners from ours! Do you make a long stay in England, now you have come back?"

"I hardly know," said Midwinter. "I have been obliged to alter my plans, and to come to England unexpectedly." He hesitated a little; his manner changed, and he added in lower tones, "A serious anxiety has brought me back. I can't say what my plans will be until that anxiety is set at rest."

The light of a lamp fell on his face while he spoke, and Mr. Bashwood observed, for the first time, that he looked sadly worn and changed.

"I'm sorry, sir—I'm sure I'm very sorry. If I could be of any use—?" suggested Mr. Bashwood, speaking under the influence, in some degree of his nervous politeness, and in some degree of his remembrance of what Midwinter had done for him at Thorpe-Ambrose in the bygone time.

Midwinter thanked him, and turned away sadly. "I am afraid you can be of no use, Mr. Bashwood—but I am obliged to you for your offer, all the same." He stopped, and considered a little, "Suppose she should *not* be ill? Suppose

some misfortune should have happened?" he resumed, speaking to himself, and turning again towards the steward. "If she has left her mother, some trace of her *might* be found by inquiring at Thorpe-Ambrose."

Mr. Bashwood's curiosity was instantly aroused. The whole sex was interesting to him now, for the sake of Miss Gwilt.

"A lady, sir?" he inquired. "Are you looking for a lady?"

"I am looking," said Midwinter simply, "for my wife."

"Married, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Bashwood. "Married since I last had the pleasure of seeing you! Might I take the liiberty of asking——?"

Midwinter's eyes dropped uneasily to the ground.

"You knew the lady in former times," he said. "I have married Miss Gwilt."

The steward started back, as he might have started back from a loaded pistol, levelled at his head. His eyes glared as if he had suddenly lost his senses, and the nervous trembling to which he was subject shook him from head to foot.

"What's the matter?" asked Midwinter. There was no answer. "What is there so very startling," he went on, a little impatiently, "in Miss Gwilt's being my wife?"

"*Your* wife?" repeated Mr. Bashwood, helplessly. "Mrs. Armadale—!" He checked himself by a desperate effort, and said no more.

The stupor of astonishment which possessed the steward was instantly reflected in Midwinter's face. The name in which he had secretly married his wife had passed the lips of the last man in the world whom he would have dreamed of admitting into his confidence! He took Mr. Bashwood by the arm, and led him away to a quieter part of the terminus than the part of it in which they had hitherto spoken to each other.

"You referred to my wife just now," he said; "and you spoke of *Mrs. Armadale* in the same breath. What do you mean by that?"

Again there was no answer. Utterly incapable of understanding more than he had involved himself in some serious complication which was a complete mystery to him, Mr. Bashwood struggled to extricate himself from the grasp that was laid on him, and struggled in vain.

Midwinter sternly repeated the question. "I ask you again," he said, "what do you mean by it?"

"Nothing, sir! I give you my word of honour I meant nothing!" He felt the hand on his arm tightening its grasp; he saw, even in the obscurity of the remote corner in which they stood, that Midwinter's fiery temper was rising, and was not to be trifled with. The extremity of his danger inspired him with the one ready capacity that a timid man possesses when he is compelled by main force to face an emergency—the capacity to lie. "I only meant to say, sir," he burst out, with a desperate effort to look and speak confidently, "that Mr. Armadale would be surprised——"

"You said *Mrs.* Armadale!"

"No, sir—on my word of honour, on my sacred word of honour, you are mistaken—you are indeed! I said *Mr.* Armadale—how could I say anything else? Please to let me go, sir—I'm pressed for time—I do assure you I'm dreadfully pressed for time!"

For a moment longer Midwinter maintained his hold, and in that moment he decided what to do.

He had accurately stated his motive for returning to England as proceeding from anxiety about his wife—anxiety naturally caused (after the regular receipt of a letter from her every other, or every third day) by the sudden cessation of the correspondence between them on her side for a whole week. The first vaguely-terrible suspicion of some other reason for her silence than the reason of accident or of illness, to which he had hitherto attributed it, had struck through him like a sudden chill the instant he heard the steward associate the name of "Mrs. Armadale" with the idea of his wife. Little irregularities in her correspondence with him, which he had thus far only thought strange, now came back on his mind and proclaimed themselves to be suspicious as well. He had hitherto believed the reasons she had given for referring him, when he answered her letters, to no more definite address than an address at a post-office. *Now* he suspected her reasons of being excuses, for the first time. He had hitherto resolved, on reaching London, to inquire at the only place he knew of at which a clue to her could be found—the address she had given him as the address at which "her mother" lived. *Now* (with a motive which he was afraid to define even to himself, but which was strong enough to overbear every other consideration in his mind), he determined, before all things, to solve the mystery of Mr. Bashwood's familiarity with a secret, which was a marriage-secret between himself and his wife. Any direct appeal to a man of the steward's disposition, in the steward's present state of mind,

would be evidently useless. The weapon of deception was, in this case, a weapon literally forced into Midwinter's hands. He let go of Mr. Bashwood's arm, and accepted Mr. Bashwood's explanation.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I have no doubt you are right. Pray attribute my rudeness to over-anxiety and over-fatigue. I wish you good evening."

The station was by this time almost a solitude; the passengers by the train being assembled at the examination of their luggage in the custom-house waiting-room. It was no easy matter, ostensibly to take leave of Mr. Bashwood, and really to keep him in view. But Midwinter's early life with his gipsy master had been of a nature to practise him in such stratagems as he was now compelled to adopt. He walked away towards the waiting-room by the line of empty carriages —opened the door of one of them, as if to look after something that he had left behind—and detected Mr. Bashwood making for the cab-rank on the opposite side of the platform. In an instant, Midwinter had crossed, and had passed through the long row of vehicles, so as to skirt it on the side farthest from the platform. He entered the second cab by the left-hand door, the moment after Mr. Bashwood had entered the first cab by the right-hand door. "Double your fare, whatever it is," he said to the driver, "if you keep the cab before you in view, and follow it wherever it goes." In a minute more both vehicles were on their way out of the station.

The clerk sat in his sentry-box at the gate, taking down the destinations of the cabs as they passed. Midwinter heard the man who was driving him, call out "Hampstead!" as he went by the clerk's window.

"Why did you say 'Hampstead'?" he asked when they had left the station.

"Because the man before me said 'Hampstead', sir," answered the driver.

Over and over again, on the wearisome journey to the north-western suburb, Midwinter asked if the cab was still in sight. Over and over again, the man answered, "Right in front of us."

Mr. Bashwood had barely completed his report of what had happened at the terminus; Mr. Bashwood's imperious mistress was still sitting speechless under the shock of the discovery that had burst on her—when the door of the room opened; and, without a word of warning to precede him, Midwinter

appeared on the threshold. He took one step into the room; and mechanically pushed the door to behind him. He stood in dead silence, and confronted his wife, with a scrutiny that was terrible in its unnatural self-possession, and that enveloped her steadily in one comprehensive look from head to foot.

In dead silence on her side, she rose from her chair. In dead silence she stood erect on the hearth-rug, and faced her husband in widow's weeds.

He took one step nearer to her and stopped again. He lifted his hand and pointed with his lean brown finger at her dress.

"What does that mean?" he asked, without losing his terrible self-possession, and without moving his out-stretched hand.

"Mr. Midwinter," she said, in tones unnaturally hard and unnaturally clear, "our acquaintance hardly entitles you to speak to me in that manner." Those were her words. She never lifted her eyes from the ground while she spoke them. When she had done, the last faint vestige of colour in her cheeks faded out.

"Are you, or are you not *my wife*?" he asked, through his set teeth.

She raised her eyes to his for the first time. Her lost spirit looked at him, steadily defiant, out of the hell of its own despair.

"I am *not* your wife," she said.

He staggered back, with his hands groping for something to hold by like the hands of a man in the dark. He leaned heavily against the wall of the room, and looked at the woman who had slept on his bosom, and who had denied him to his face.

Mr. Bashwood stole panic-stricken to her side. "Go in there!" he whispered, trying to draw her towards the folding doors which led into the next room. "For God's sake be quick! He'll kill you!"

She put the old man back with her hand. She looked at him with a sudden irradiation of her blank face. She answered him with lips that struggled slowly into a frightful smile.

"*Let* him kill me," she said.

As the words passed her lips, he sprang forward from the wall, with a cry that rang through the house. The frenzy of a maddened man flashed at her from his glassy eyes, and

clutched at her in his threatening hands. He came on till he was within arm's length of her—and suddenly stood still. The black flush died out of his face in the instant when he stopped. His eyelids fell, his outstretched hands wavered, and sank helpless. He dropped, as the dead drop. He lay as the dead lie, in the arms of the wife who had denied him.

She knelt on the floor, and rested his head on her knee. She caught the arm of the steward hurrying to help her, with a hand that closed round it like a vice. "Go for a doctor," she said, "and keep the people of the house away till he comes." There was that in her eye, there was that in her voice, which would have warned any man living to obey her in silence. In silence, Mr. Bashwood submitted, and hurried out of the room.

The landlady and the steward were the first persons whom she saw when the door was opened. The medical man (a surgeon living in the street) followed. The horror and the beauty of her face as she looked up at him absorbed the surgeon's attention for the moment, to the exclusion of everything else. She had to beckon to him, she had to point to the senseless man, before she could claim his attention for his patient and divert it from herself.

"Is he dead?" she asked.

The surgeon carried Midwinter to the sofa, and ordered the windows to be opened. "It is a fainting fit," he said; "nothing more."

At that answer her strength failed her for the first time. She drew a deep breath of relief, and leaned on the chimney-piece for support. Mr. Bashwood was the only person present who noticed that she was overcome. He led her to the opposite end of the room, where there was an easy chair—leaving the landlady to hand the restoratives to the surgeon as they were wanted.

"Are you going to wait here till he recovers?" whispered the steward, looking towards the sofa, and trembling as he looked.

The question roused her to a sense of her position—to a knowledge of the merciless necessities which that position now forced her to confront. With a heavy sigh she looked towards the sofa, considered with herself for a moment, and answered Mr. Bashwood's inquiry by a question on her side.

"Is the cab that brought you here from the railway still at the door?"

"Yes."

"Drive at once to the gates of the sanatorium, and wait there till I join you."

Mr. Bashwood hesitated. She lifted her eyes to his, and, with a look, sent him out of the room.

"The gentleman is coming to, ma'am," said the landlady, as the steward closed the door. "He has just breathed again."

She bowed in mute reply, rose, and considered with herself once more—looked towards the sofa for the second time—then passed through the folding-doors into her own room.

After a short lapse of time the surgeon drew back from the sofa, and motioned to the landlady to stand aside. The bodily recovery of the patient was assured. There was nothing to be done now but to wait, and let his mind slowly recall its sense of what had happened.

"Where is she?" were the first words he said to the surgeon and the landlady anxiously watching him.

The landlady knocked at the folding-doors, and received no answer. She went in, and found the room empty. A sheet of notepaper was on the dressing-table, with the doctor's fee placed on it. The paper contained these lines, evidently written in great agitation or in great haste:—"It is impossible for me to remain here to-night, after what has happened. I will return to-morrow to take away my luggage, and to pay what I owe you."

"Where is she?" Midwinter asked again, when the landlady returned alone to the drawing-room.

"Gone, sir."

"I don't believe it!"

The old lady's colour rose. "If you know her handwriting, sir," she answered, handing him the sheet of notepaper, "perhaps you may believe *that*?"

He looked at the paper. "I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said, as he handed it back. "I beg your pardon, with all my heart."

There was something in his face as he spoke those words which more than soothed the old lady's irritation—it touched her with a sudden pity for the man who had offended her. "I am afraid there is some dreadful trouble, sir, at the bottom of all this," she said simply. "Do you wish me to give any message to the lady when she comes back?"

Midwinter rose, and steadied himself for a moment against the sofa. "I will bring my own message to-morrow," he said. "I must see her before she leaves your house."

The surgeon accompanied his patient into the street. "Can I see you home?" he said, kindly. "You had better not walk, if it is far. You mustn't over-exert yourself; you mustn't catch a chill this cold night."

Midwinter took his hand and thanked him. "I have been used to hard walking and to cold nights, sir," he said; "and I am not easily worn out, even when I look so broken as I do now. If you will tell me the nearest way out of these streets, I think the quiet of the country and the quiet of the night will help me. I have something serious to do to-morrow," he added, in a lower tone; "and I can't rest or sleep till I have thought over it to-night."

The surgeon understood that he had no common man to deal with. He gave the necessary directions without any further remark, and parted with his patient at his own door.

Left by himself, Midwinter paused and looked up at the heaven in silence. The night had cleared, and the stars were out—the stars which he had first learnt to know from his gipsy master on the hillside. For the first time his mind went back regretfully to his boyish days. "Oh, for the old life!" he thought, longingly. "I never knew till now how happy the old life was!"

He roused himself and went on towards the open country. His face darkened as he left the streets behind him and advanced into the solitude and obscurity that lay beyond.

"She has denied her husband to-night," he said. "She shall know her master to-morrow."

CHAPTER III

THE PURPLE FLASK

The cab was waiting at the gates as Miss Gwilt approached the sanatorium. Mr. Bashwood got out and advanced to meet her. She took his arm and led him aside a few steps, out of the cabman's hearing.

"Think what you like of me," she said, keeping her thick black veil down over her face—"but don't speak to me to-night. Drive back to your hotel as if nothing had happened. Meet the tidal train to-morrow as usual; and come to me afterwards at the sanatorium. Go without a word, and I shall believe there is one man in the world who really loves

me. Stay and ask questions, and I shall bid you good-bye at once and for ever!"

She pointed to the cab. In a minute more it had left the sanatorium and was taking Mr. Bashwood back to his hotel.

She opened the iron gate and walked slowly up to the house door. A shudder ran through her as she rang the bell. She laughed bitterly. "Shivering again!" she said to herself. "Who would have thought I had so much feeling left in me?"

For once in his life the doctor's face told the truth, when the study door opened between ten and eleven at night, and Miss Gwilt entered the room.

"Mercy on me!" he exclaimed, with a look of the blankest bewilderment, "what does this mean?"

"It means," she answered, "that I have decided to-night instead of deciding to-morrow. You, who know women so well, ought to know that they act on impulse. I am here on an impulse. Take me or leave me, just as you like."

"Take you or leave you?" repeated the doctor, recovering his presence of mind. "My dear lady, what a dreadful way of putting it! Your room shall be got ready instantly! Where is your luggage? Will you let me send for it? No? You can do without your luggage to-night? What admirable fortitude! You will fetch it yourself to-morrow? What extraordinary independence! Do take off your bonnet. Do draw in to the fire. What can I offer you?"

"Offer me the strongest sleeping draught you ever made in your life," she replied. "And leave me alone till the time comes to take it. I shall be your patient in earnest!" she added fiercely as the doctor attempted to remonstrate. "I shall be the maddest of the mad if you irritate me to-night!"

The Principal of the Sanatorium became gravely and briefly professional in an instant.

"Sit down in that dark corner," he said. "Not a soul shall disturb you. In half an hour you will find your room ready, and your sleeping-draught on the table. It's been a harder struggle for her than I anticipated," he thought, as he left the room, and crossed to his dispensary on the opposite side of the hall. "Good heavens, what business has *she* with a conscience, after such a life as hers has been!"

The dispensary was elaborately fitted up with all the latest improvements in medical furniture. But one of the four walls of the room was unoccupied by shelves, and here the vacant

The doctor, who had noticed before she spoke that her face looked strangely pale and old that morning, observed when she answered him that her expression—naturally mobile in no ordinary degree—remained quite unaltered by the effort of speaking. There was none of the usual animation on her lips, none of the usual temper in her eyes. He had never seen her so impenetrably and coldly composed as he saw her now. "She has made up her mind at last," he thought. "I may say to her this morning, what I couldn't say to her last night."

He prefaced the coming remarks by a warning look at her widow's dress.

"Now you have got your luggage," he began gravely, "permit me to suggest putting that cap away, and wearing another gown."

"Why?"

"Do you remember what you told me, a day or two since?" asked the doctor. "You said there was a chance of Mr. Armadale's dying in my sanatorium?"

"I will say it again, if you like."

"A more unlikely chance," pursued the doctor, deaf as ever to all awkward interruptions, "it is hardly possible to imagine! But as long as it *is* a chance at all, it is worth considering. Say then that he dies,—suddenly and unexpectedly, and makes a Coroner's Inquest necessary in the house. What is our course in that case? Our course is to preserve the characters to which we have committed ourselves—you as his widow, and I as the witness of your marriage—and, *in* those characters, to court the fullest inquiry. In the entirely improbable event of his dying just when we want him to die, my idea—I might even say, my resolution—is, to admit that we knew of his resurrection from the sea; and to acknowledge that we instructed Mr. Bashwood to entrap him into this house, by means of a false statement about Miss Milroy. When the inevitable questions follow, I propose to assert that he exhibited symptoms of mental alienation shortly after your marriage—that his delusion consisted in denying that you were his wife, and in declaring that he was engaged to be married to Miss Milroy—that you were in such terror of him on this account, when you heard he was alive and coming back, as to be in a state of nervous agitation that required my care—that at your request, and to calm that nervous agitation, I saw him professionally, and got him quietly into the house by a humouring of his delusion perfectly justifiable in such a case

—and lastly, that I can certify his brain to have been affected by one of those mysterious disorders, eminently incurable, eminently fatal, in relation to which medical science is still in the dark. Such a course as this (in the remotely possible event which we are now supposing) would be, in your interests and mine, unquestionably the right course to take—and such a dress as *that* is, just as certainly, under existing circumstances, the wrong dress to wear."

"Shall I take it off at once?" she asked, rising from the breakfast-table, without a word of remark on what had just been said to her.

"Any time before two o'clock to-day, will do," said the doctor.

She looked at him with a languid curiosity—nothing more. "Why before two?" she inquired.

"Because this is one of my 'Visitors' Days.' And the Visitors' time is from two to four."

"What have I to do with your visitors?"

"Simply this. I think it important that perfectly respectable and perfectly disinterested witnesses should see you, in my house, in the character of a lady who has come to consult me."

"Your motive seems rather far-fetched.—Is it the only motive you have in the matter?"

"My dear, dear lady!" remonstrated the doctor; "have I any concealments from *you*? Surely you ought to know me better than that?"

"Yes," she said, with a weary contempt. "It's dull enough of me not to understand you by this time.—Send word upstairs, when I am wanted." She left him, and went back to her room.

The proprietor of the Sanatorium received his visitors in the hall with Miss Gwilt on his arm. The hungry eyes of every woman in the company overlooked the doctor as if no such person had existed; and, fixing on the strange lady, devoured her from head to foot in an instant.

"My First Inmate," said the doctor, presenting Miss Gwilt. "This lady only arrived late last night; and she takes the present opportunity (the only one my morning's engagements have allowed me to give her) of going over the Sanatorium. Allow me, ma'am," he went on, releasing Miss Gwilt, and giving his arm to the eldest lady among the visitors. "Shattered nerves—domestic anxiety," he whispered confi-

dentially. "Sweet woman! sad case!" He sighed softly, and led the old lady across the hall.

The flock of visitors followed; Miss Gwilt accompanying them in silence, and walking alone—among them, but not of them—the last of all.

"The grounds, ladies and gentlemen;" said the doctor, wheeling round and addressing his audience, from the foot of the stairs, "are, as you have seen, in a partially unfinished condition. Under any circumstances, I should lay little on the grounds, having Hampstead Heath so near at hand, and carriage-exercise and horse-exercise being parts of my System. In a lesser degree it is also necessary for me to ask your indulgence for the basement floor, on which we now stand. The waiting-room and study on that side, and the Dispensary on the other (to which I shall presently ask your attention), are completed. But the large drawing-room is still in the decorator's hands. In that room (when the walls are dry—not a moment before) my inmates will assemble for cheerful society. Nothing will be spared that can improve, elevate, and adorn life, at these happy little gatherings. Every evening, for example, there will be music for those who like it."

The doctor led the way—with intervals of breathing-time accorded to the old lady on his arm—straight to the top of the house. Having collected his visitors in the corridor, and having waved his hand indicatively at the numbered doors opening out of it on either side, he invited the company to look into any or all of the rooms at their own pleasure.

He threw open the door of a room at one extremity of the corridor, numbered Four. "Look in, ladies and gentlemen," he said; "and, if you see anything remarkable, pray mention it."

The room was not very large, but it was well lit by one broad window. Comfortably furnished as a bedroom, it was only remarkable among other rooms of the same sort in one way. It had no fireplace. The visitors having noticed this, were informed that the room was warmed in winter by means of hot water; and were then invited back again into the corridor, to make the discoveries, under professional direction, which they were unable to make for themselves.

"A word, ladies and gentlemen," said the doctor; "literally a word, on nervous derangement first. What is the process of treatment, when, let us say, mental anxiety has broken you down, and you apply to your doctor? He sees you, hears

you, and gives you two prescriptions. One is written on paper, and made up at the chemist's. The other is administered by word of mouth, at the propitious moment when the fee is ready; and consists in a general recommendation to you to keep your mind easy. That excellent advice given, your doctor leaves you to spare yourself all earthly annoyances by your own unaided efforts, until he calls again. Here, my System steps in, and helps you! When *I* see the necessity of keeping your mind easy, I take the bull by the horns and do it for you. I place you in a sphere of action in which the ten thousand trifles which must, and do, irritate nervous people at home, are expressly considered and provided against. I throw up impregnable moral entrenchments between Worry and You. Find a door banging in *this* house, if you can! Catch a servant in *this* house, rattling the tea-things when he takes away the tray!"

The doctor paused to take breath; and looked for the first time since the visitors had entered the house, at Miss Gwilt. For the first time on her side, she stepped forward among the audience, and looked at him in return. After a momentary obstruction in the shape of a cough, the doctor went on.

"Say, ladies and gentlemen," he proceeded, "that my patient has just come in. His mind is one mass of nervous fancies and caprices, which his friends (with the best possible intentions) have been ignorantly irritating at home. They have been afraid of him, for instance, at night. They have forced him to have somebody to sleep in the room with him, or, they have forbidden him, in case of accidents, to lock his door. He comes to me the first night, and says, 'Mind, I won't have anybody in my room!'—'Certainly not!'—'I insist on locking my door.'—'By all means!' In he goes, and locks his door; and there he is, soothed and quieted, predisposed to confidence, predisposed to sleep, by having his own way. 'This is all very well,' you may say; 'but suppose something happens, suppose he has a fit in the night, what then?' You shall see! Hullo, my young friend!" cried the doctor, suddenly addressing the sleepy little boy. "Let's have a game. You shall be the poor sick man, and I'll be the good doctor. Go into that room, and lock the door. There's a brave boy! Have you locked it? Very good. Do you think I can't get at you if I like? I wait till you're asleep.—I press this little white button here in the stencilled pattern of the outer wall—the mortice of the lock inside falls back silently against the door-post—and I walk into the room whenever I like. The same plan is

pursued with the window. My capricious patient won't open it at night, when he ought. I humour him again. 'Shut it, dear sir, by all means!' As soon as he is asleep, I pull the black handle hidden here, in the corner of the wall. The window of the room inside noiselessly opens, as you see. Say the patient's caprice is the other way—he persists in opening the window when he ought to shut it. Let him! by all means let him! I pull a second handle when he is snug in his bed, and the window noiselessly closes in a moment. Nothing to irritate him, ladies and gentlemen—absolutely nothing to irritate him! But I haven't done with him yet. Epidemic disease, in spite of all my precautions, may enter this Sanatorium, and may render the purifying of the sick-room necessary. Or the patient's case may be complicated by other than nervous malady—say, for instance, asthmatic difficulty of breathing. In the one case, fumigation is necessary: in the other, additional oxygen in the air will give relief. The epidemic nervous patient says, 'I won't be smoked under my own nose!" The asthmatic nervous patient gasps with terror at the idea of a chemical explosion in his room. I noiselessly fumigate one of them; I noiselessly oxygenize the other, by means of a simple Apparatus fixed outside in the corner here. It is protected by this wooden casing; it is locked with my own key; and it communicates by means of a tube with the interior of the room. Look at it!"

With a preliminary glance at Miss Gwilt, the doctor unlocked the lid of the wooden casing, and disclosed inside nothing more remarkable than a large stone jar, having a glass funnel, and a pipe communicating with the wall, inserted in the cork which closed the mouth of it. With another look at Miss Gwilt, the doctor locked the lid again, and asked in the blandest manner, whether his System was intelligible now?

"I might introduce you to all sorts of other contrivances of the same kind," he resumed, leading the way downstairs—"but it would be only the same thing over and over again. A nervous patient who always has his own way, is a nervous patient who is never worried—and a nervous patient who is never worried, is a nervous patient cured. There it is in a nutshell!—Come and see the Dispensary, ladies; the Dispensary and the kitchen next!"

Once more, Miss Gwilt dropped behind the visitors, and waited alone—looking steadfastly at the Room which the doctor had opened, and at the Apparatus which the doctor

had unlocked. Again, without a word passing between them, she had understood him. She knew as well as if he had confessed it, that he was craftily putting the necessary temptation in her way, before witnesses who could speak to the superficially-innocent acts which they had seen, if anything serious happened. The Apparatus, originally constructed to serve the purpose of the doctor's medical crochets, was evidently to be put to some other use, of which the doctor himself had probably never dreamed till now. And the chances were that before the day was over, that other use would be privately revealed to her at the right moment, in the presence of the right witness. "Armadale will die this time," she said to herself as she went slowly down the stairs. "The doctor will kill him, by my hands."

The visitors were in the Dispensary when she joined them. All the ladies were admiring the beauty of the antique cabinet; and, as a necessary consequence, all the ladies were desirous of seeing what was inside. The doctor—after a preliminary look at Miss Gwilt—good humouredly shook his head. "There is nothing to interest you inside," he said. "Nothing but rows of little shabby bottles containing the poisons used in medicine which I keep under lock and key. Come to the kitchen, ladies, and honour me with your advice on domestic matters below stairs." He glanced again at Miss Gwilt as the company crossed the hall, with a look which said plainly, "Wait here."

In another quarter-of-an-hour, the doctor had expounded his views on cookery and diet, and the visitors (duly furnished with prospectuses) were taking leave of him at the door. "Quite an intellectual treat!" they said to each other, as they streamed out again in neatly-dressed procession through the iron gates. "And what a very superior man!"

The doctor turned back to the Dispensary, humming absently to himself, and failing entirely to observe the corner of the hall in which Miss Gwilt stood retured. After an instant's hesitation, she followed him. The assistant was in the room when she entered it—summoned by his employer the moment before.

"Doctor," she said, coldly and mechanically, as if she was repeating a lesson; "I am as curious as the other ladies about that pretty cabinet of yours. Now they are all gone, won't you show the inside of it to *me*?"

The doctor laughed in his pleasantest manner.

"The old story," he said. "Blue-Beard's locked chamber,

and female curiosity! (Don't go, Benjamin, don't go.) My dear lady, what interest can you possibly have in looking at a medical bottle, simply because it happens to be a bottle of poison?"

She repeated her lesson for the second time.

"I have the interest of looking at it," she said, "and of thinking, if it got into some people's hands, of the terrible things it might do."

The doctor glanced at his assistant with a compassionate smile.

"Curious, Benjamin," he said; "the romantic view taken of these drugs of ours by the unscientific mind. My dear lady," he added, turning again to Miss Gwilt, "if *that* is the interest you attach to looking at poisons, you needn't ask me to unlock my cabinet—you need only look about you round the shelves of this room. There are all sorts of medical liquids and substances in those bottles—most innocent, most useful in themselves—which, in combination with other substances and other liquids, become poisons as terrible and as deadly as any that I have in my cabinet under lock and key."

She looked at him for a moment, and crossed to the opposite side of the room.

"Show me one," she said.

Still smiling as good-humouredly as ever, the doctor humoured his nervous patient. He pointed to the bottle from which he had privately removed the yellow liquid on the previous day, and which he had filled up again with a carefully-coloured imitation, in the shape of a mixture of his own.

"Do you see that bottle?" he said; "that plump, round, comfortable-looking bottle? Never mind the name of what is inside it; let us stick to the bottle, and distinguish it, if you like, by giving it a name of our own. Suppose we call it 'our Stout Friend'? Very good. Our Stout Friend, by himself, is a most harmless and useful medicine. He is freely dispensed every day to tens of thousands of patients all over the civilised world. He has made no romantic appearances in courts of law; he has excited no breathless interest in novels; he has played no terrifying part on the stage. There he is, an innocent, inoffensive creature, who troubles nobody with the responsibility of locking him up! *But* bring him into contact with something else—introduce him to the acquaintance of a certain common mineral Substance, of a universally accessible kind, broken into fragments; provide

yourself with (say) six doses of our Stout Friend, and pour those doses consecutively on the fragments I have mentioned, at intervals of not less than five minutes. Quantities of little bubbles will rise at every pouring; collect the gas in those bubbles; and convey it into a closed chamber—and let Samson himself be in that closed chamber, our Stout Friend will kill him in half-an-hour. Will kill him slowly, without his seeing anything, without his feeling anything but sleepiness. Will kill him, and tell the whole College of Surgeons nothing, if they examine him after death, but that he died of apoplexy or congestion of the lungs! What do you think of *that*, my dear lady, in the way of mystery and romance? Is our harmless Stout Friend as interesting *now* as if he rejoiced in the terrible popular fame of the Arsenic and the Strychnine which I keep locked up there? Don't suppose I am exaggerating! Don't suppose I'm inventing a story to put you off with, as the children say. Ask Benjamin, there," said the doctor, appealing to his assistant, with his eyes fixed on Miss Gwilt. "Ask Benjamin," he repeated, with the steadiest emphasis on the next words, "if six doses from that bottle, at intervals of five minutes each, would not, under the conditions I have stated, produce the results I have described?"

The Resident Dispenser, modestly admiring Miss Gwilt at a distance, started and coloured up. He was plainly gratified by the little attention which had included him in the conversation.

"The doctor is quite right, ma'am," he said, addressing Miss Gwilt, with his best bow, "the production of the gas, extended over half an hour, would be quite gradual enough. And," added the Dispenser, silently appealing to his employer to let him exhibit a little chemical knowledge on his own account, "the volume of the gas would be sufficient at the end of the time—if I am not mistaken, sir?—to be fatal to any person entering the room, in less than five minutes."

"Unquestionably, Benjamin," rejoined the doctor "But I think we have had enough of chemistry for the present," he adding, turning to Miss Gwilt. "With every desire, my dear lady, to gratify every passing wish you may form, I venture to propose trying a more cheerful subject. Suppose we leave the Dispensary, before it suggests any more inquiries to that active mind of yours? No? You want to see an experiment? You want to see how the little bubbles are made? Well, well! there is no harm in that. We will let Mrs. Armadale see the bubbles," continued the doctor, in the tone of a parent humouring a spoilt child. "Try if you can find a few of

those fragments that we want, Benjamin. I daresay the workmen (slovenly fellows!) have left something of the sort about the house or the grounds."

The Resident Dispenser left the room.

As soon as his back was turned, the doctor began opening and shutting drawers in various parts of the dispensary, with the air of a man who wants something in a hurry, and doesn't know where to find it. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, suddenly stopping at the drawer from which he had taken his cards of invitation on the previous day, "what's this? A key? A duplicate key, as I'm alive, of my fumigating Apparatus upstairs! Oh dear, dear, how careless I get," said the doctor, turning round briskly to Miss Gwilt. "I hadn't the least idea that I possessed this second key. I should never have missed it. I do assure you I should never have missed it, if anybody had taken it out of the drawer!" He bustled away to the other end of the room—without closing the drawer, and without taking away the duplicate key.

In silence, Miss Gwilt listened till he had done. In silence, she glided to the drawer. In silence, she took the key and hid it in her apron pocket.

The Dispenser came back, with the fragments required of him, collected in a basin. "Thank you, Benjamin," said the doctor. "Kindly cover them with water, while I get the bottle down."

As accidents sometimes happen in the most perfectly regulated families, so clumsiness sometimes possesses itself of the most perfectly-disciplined hands. In the process of its transfer from the shelf to the doctor, the bottle slipped, and fell smashed to pieces on the floor.

"Oh, my fingers and thumbs!" cried the doctor, with an air of comic vexation, "what in the world do you mean by playing me such a wicked trick as that? Well, well, well—it can't be helped. Have we got any more of it, Benjamin?"

"Not a drop, sir."

"Not a drop!" echoed the doctor. "My dear madam, what excuses can I offer you? My clumsiness has made our little experiment impossible for to-day. Remind me to order some more to-morrow, Benjamin—and don't think of troubling yourself to put that mess to right. I'll send the man here to mop it all up. Our Stout Friend is harmless enough now, my dear lady—in combination with a boarded floor and a coming mop! I'm so sorry; I really am so sorry to have disappointed you." With those soothing words,

he offered his arm, and led Miss Gwilt out of the dispensary.

"Have you done with me for the present?" she asked when they were in the hall.

"Oh dear, dear, what a way of putting it!" exclaimed the doctor. "Dinner at six," he added with his politest emphasis, as she turned from him in disdainful silence, and slowly mounted the stairs to her own room.

A clock of the noiseless sort—incapable of offending irritable nerves—was fixed in the wall, above the first-floor landing, at the Sanatorium. At the moment when the hands pointed to a quarter before six, the silence of the lonely upper regions was softly broken by the rustling of Miss Gwilt's dress. She advanced along the corridor of the first-floor—paused at the covered Apparatus fixed outside the room numbered Four—listened for a moment—and then unlocked the cover with the duplicate key.

The open lid cast a shadow over the inside of the casing. All she saw at first, was what she had seen already—the jar and the pipe and glass funnel inserted in the cork. She removed the funnel; and, looking about her, observed on the window-sill close by, a wax-tipped wand used for lighting the gas. She took the wand, and, introducing it through the aperture occupied by the funnel, moved it to and fro in the jar. The faint splash of some liquid, and the grating noise of certain hard substances which she was stirring about, were the two sounds that caught her ear. She drew out the wand, and cautiously touched the wet left on it with the tip of her tongue. Caution was quite needless in this case. The liquid was—water.

In putting the funnel back in its place, she noticed something faintly shining in the obscurely-lit vacant space at the side of the jar. She drew it out, and produced a Purple Flask. The liquid with which it was filled showed dark through the transparent colouring of the glass; and, fastened at regular intervals down one side of the Flask, were six thin strips of paper which divided the contents into six equal parts.

There was no doubt now, that the Apparatus had been secretly prepared for her—the Apparatus of which she alone (besides the doctor) possessed the key.

The evening wore on and the night came.

At a few minutes before ten, Mr. Bashwood was again at

his post; once more on the watch for the coming of the tidal train.

The inspector on duty, who knew him by sight, and who had personally ascertained that his regular attendance at the terminus implied no designs on the purses and portmanteaus of the passengers, noticed two new circumstances in connection with Mr. Bashwood that night. In the first place, instead of exhibiting his customary cheerfulness, he looked anxious and depressed. In the second place, while he was watching for the train, he was to all appearance being watched in his turn, by a slim, dark, undersized man, who had left his luggage (marked with the name of Midwinter,) at the custom-house department the evening before, and who had returned to have it examined about half an hour since.

What had brought Midwinter to the terminus? and why was he, too, waiting for the tidal train?

After straying as far as Hendon during his lonely walk of the previous night, he had taken refuge at the village inn, and had fallen asleep (from sheer exhaustion) towards those later hours of the morning, which were the hours that his wife's foresight had turned to account. When he returned to the lodging, the landlady could only inform him that her tenant had settled everything with her, and had left (for what destination neither she nor her servant could tell) more than two hours since.

Having given some little time to inquiries, the result of which convinced him that the clue was lost so far, Midwinter had quitted the house, and had pursued his way mechanically to the busier and more central parts of the metropolis. With the light now thrown on his wife's character, to call at the address she had given him as the address at which her mother lived would be plainly useless. He went on through the streets, resolute to discover her, and trying vainly to see the means to his end, till the sense of fatigue forced itself on him once more. Stopping to rest and recruit his strength at the first hotel he came to, a chance dispute between the waiter and a stranger about a lost portmanteau reminded him of his own luggage, left at the terminus, and instantly took his mind back to the circumstances under which he and Mr. Bashwood had met. In a moment more, the idea that he had been vainly seeking on his way through the streets flashed on him. In a moment more, he had determined to try the chance of finding the steward again on the watch for the person whose arrival he had evidently expected by the previous evening's train.

A rush to the window showed them leaden skies, and the straight lines of heavy rain.

The snow was melting fast and it felt warmer. The meet on the card was Athgarvin away in the hills, with the low valleys round it, but a meet anywhere was something to dream of.

Grania ran to the door, letting in a whistling blast. Lord Kilanour shivered pettishly, because, as he said aloud to himself, these silly fools of children would have gone home if it had not thawed, and Herbert remarked disagreeably that it would be freezing again in two days' time and he was going to fish."

" I've told them I want the Creena to myself," he said. " I've written to the man at the Castle. He told me some fellows had leave, but it had better be cancelled."

The old man's face grew bleak and pinched.

" I gave them leave," he said stoutly. " Some friends who always fish. Not dead yet," he added to himself. " Cub, cub."

Herbert's face lowered with savage contempt for the old man's habit. He meant to have his own way.

The westerly wind held. A soaking warm rain loosened the grip of the frost. Fields squelched again when the horses were galloped, puffing and panting beneath their layers of fat.

The Friday at Athgarvin dawned redly, the clouds rolled up, but lurking raggedly on the edges of the wind. A blaze of golden sunshine set the earth throbbing, and spring danced as if he meant to stay.

Tommy forgot trouble as he got on to his new horse, which he had ridden only once. Martin's dun was like a small ball of horseflesh, and Trevor's old grey stepped up to the meet as if he had never known troubles.

" All the winter gone without its having been there at all," grumbled Trevor. " It's March now."

" Anyhow you fellows can think of November," returned Tommy, eyeing his grey mare who was behaving

for the first time since it had fallen on him, and gently taking Allan aside, asked what had happened.

The answer—after informing him of his friend's reported death at sea—announced (on Mr. Bashwood's authority) that the news had reached Miss Milroy, and that the deplorable result of the shock thus inflicted, had obliged the major to place his daughter in the neighbourhood of London, under medical care.

Before saying a word on his side, Midwinter looked distrustfully behind him. Mr. Bashwood had followed them. Mr. Bashwood was watching to see what they did next.

"Was he waiting your arrival here to tell you this about Miss Milroy?" asked Midwinter, looking back again from the steward to Allan.

"Yes," said Allan. "He has been kindly waiting here, night after night, to meet me, and break the news to me."

Midwinter paused once more. The attempt to reconcile the conclusion he had drawn from his wife's conduct with the discovery that Allan was the man for whose arrival Mr. Bashwood had been waiting, was hopeless. The one present chance of discovering a truer solution of the mystery, was to press the steward on the one available point in which he had laid himself open to attack. He had positively denied on the previous evening that he knew anything of Allan's movements, or that he had any interest in Allan's return to England. Having detected Mr. Bashwood in one lie told to himself, Midwinter instantly suspected him of telling another to Allan. He seized the opportunity of sifting the statement about Miss Milroy on the spot.

"How have you become acquainted with this sad news?" Midwinter inquired, turning suddenly on Mr. Bashwood.

"Through the major of course," said Allan, before the steward could answer.

"Who is the doctor who has the care of Miss Milroy?" persisted Midwinter, still addressing Mr. Bashwood.

For the second time the steward made no reply. For the second time, Allan answered for him.

"He is a man with a foreign name," said Allan. "He keeps a Sanatorium near Hampstead. What did you say the place was called, Mr. Bashwood?"

"Fairweather Vale, sir," said the steward, answering very unwillingly.

The address of the Sanatorium instantly reminded Mid-

winter that he had traced his wife to Fairweather Vale Villas the previous night. He began to see light through the darkness, dimly, for the first time. The instinct which comes with emergency, before the slower process of reason can assert itself, brought him at a leap to the conclusion that Mr. Bashwood—who had been certainly acting under his wife's influence the previous day—might be acting again under his wife's influence now. He persisted in sifting the steward's statement, with the conviction growing firmer and firmer in his mind that the statement was a lie, and that his wife was concerned in it.

"Is the major in Norfolk?" he asked, "or is he near his daughter in London?"

"In Norfolk," said Mr. Bashwood. Having answered Allan's look of inquiry, instead of Midwinter's spoken question, in those words, he hesitated, looked Midwinter in the face for the first time, and added, suddenly, "I object, if you please, to be cross-examined, sir. I know what I have told Mr. Armadale, and I know no more."

The words, and the voice in which they were spoken, were alike at variance with Mr. Bashwood's usual language and Mr. Bashwood's usual tone. There was a sullen depression in his face—there was a furtive distrust and dislike in his eyes when they looked at Midwinter, which Midwinter himself now noticed for the first time. Before he could answer the steward's extraordinary outbreak, Allan interfered.

"Don't think me impatient," he said. "But it's getting late; it's a long way to Hampstead. I'm afraid the Sanatorium will be shut up."

Midwinter started. "You are not going to the Sanatorium to-night!" he exclaimed.

Allan took his friend's hand, and wrung it hard. "If you were as fond of her as I am," he whispered, "you would take no rest, you could get no sleep, till you had seen the doctor, and heard the best and the worst he had to tell you. Poor dear little soul! who knows, if she could only see me alive and well——" The tears came into his eyes, and he turned away his head in silence.

Midwinter looked at the steward. "Stand back," he said. "I want to speak to Mr. Armadale." There was something in his eye which it was not safe to trifle with. Mr. Bashwood drew back out of hearing, but not out of sight. Midwinter laid his hand fondly on his friend's shoulder.

"Allan," he said, "I have reasons—" He stopped. Could

the reasons be given before he had fairly realised them himself; at that time, too, and under those circumstances? Impossible! "I have reasons," he resumed, "for advising you not to believe too readily what Mr. Bashwood may say. Don't tell him this, but take the warning."

Allan looked at his friend in astonishment. "It was you who always liked Mr. Bashwood!" he exclaimed. "It was you who trusted him, when he first came to the great house!"

"Perhaps I was wrong, Allan, and perhaps you were right. Will you only wait till we can telegraph to Major Milroy and get his answer? Will you only wait over the night?"

"I shall go mad if I wait over the night," said Allan. "You have made me more anxious than I was before. If I am not to speak about it to Bashwood, I must and will go to the Sanatorium, and find out whether she is or not there, from the doctor himself."

Midwinter saw that it was useless. In Allan's interests there was only one other course left to take. "Will you let me go with you?" he asked.

Allan's face brightened for the first time. "You dear, good fellow!" he exclaimed. "It was the very thing I was going to beg of you myself."

Midwinter beckoned to the steward. "Mr. Armadale is going to the Sanatorium," he said, "and I mean to accompany him. Get a cab and come with us."

He waited, to see whether Mr. Bashwood would comply. Having been strictly ordered, when Allan did arrive, not to lose sight of him, and having, in his own interests, Midwinter's unexpected appearance to explain to Miss Gwilt, the steward had no choice but to comply. In sullen submission he did as he had been told. The keys of Allan's baggage were given to the foreign travelling servant whom he had brought with him, and the man was instructed to wait his master's orders at the terminus hotel. In a minute more the cab was on its way out of the station—with Midwinter and Allan inside, and with Mr. Bashwood by the driver on the box.

. . . . . .

Between eleven and twelve o'clock that night, Miss Gwilt, standing alone at the window which lit the corridor of the sanatorium on the second floor, heard the roll of wheels coming towards her. The sound, gathering rapidly in volume

through the silence of the lonely neighbourhood, stopped at the iron gates. In another minute she saw the cab draw up beneath her, at the house door.

The earlier night had been cloudy, but the sky was clearing now, and the moon was out. She opened the window to see and hear more clearly. By the light of the moon she saw Allan get out of the cab, and turn round to speak to some other person inside. The answering voice told her, before he appeared in his turn, that Armadale's companion was her husband.

The same petrifying influence that had fallen on her at the interview with him of the previous day, fell on her now. She stood by the window, white and still, and haggard and old—as she had stood when she first faced him in her widow's weeds.

Mr. Bashwood, stealing up alone to the second floor to make his report, knew, the instant he set eyes on her, that the report was needless. "It's not my fault," was all he said, as she slowly turned her head and looked at him. "They met together, and there was no parting them."

She drew a long breath, and motioned to him to be silent. "Wait a little," she said; "I know all about it."

Turning from him at those words, she slowly paced the corridor to its furthest end; turned, and slowly came back to him with frowning brow and drooping head—with all the grace and beauty gone from her, but the inbred grace and beauty in the movement of her limbs.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" she asked; her mind far away from him, and her eyes looking at him vacantly as she put the question.

He roused his courage as he had never roused it in her presence yet.

"Don't drive me to despair!" he cried, with a startling abruptness. "Don't look at me in that way, now I have found it out!"

"What have you found out?" she asked, with a momentary surprise on her face, which faded from it again before he could gather breath enough to go on.

"Mr. Armadale is not the man who took you away from me," he answered. "Mr. Midwinter is the man. I found it out in your face yesterday. I see it in your face now. Why did you sign your name, 'Armadale' when you wrote to me? Why do you call yourself 'Mrs. Armadale' still?"

He spoke those bold words at long intervals, with an effort to resist her influence over him, pitiable and terrible to see.

She looked at him for the first time with softened eyes. "I wish I had pitied you when we first met," she said gently, "as I pity you now."

He struggled desperately to go on, and say the words to her which he had strung himself to the pitch of saying on the drive from the terminus. They were words which hinted darkly at his knowledge of her past life; words which warned her—do what else she might; commit what crimes she pleased—to think twice before she deceived and deserted him again. In those terms he had vowed to himself to address her. He had the phrases picked and chosen; he had the sentences ranged and ordered in his mind; nothing was wanting but to make the one crowning effort of speaking them—and even now, after all he had said, and all he had dared, the effort was more than he could compass! In helpless gratitude, even for so little as her pity, he stood looking at her, and wept the silent womanish tears that fall from old men's eyes.

She took his hand and spoke to him—with marked forbearance, but without the slightest sign of emotion on her side.

"You have waited already at my request," she said. "Wait till to-morrow, and you will know all. If you trust nothing else that I have told you, you may trust what I tell you now. *It will end to-night.*"

As she said the words, the doctor's step was heard on the stairs. Mr. Bashwood drew back from her, with his heart beating fast in unutterable expectation. "It will end to-night!" he repeated to himself, under his breath, as he moved away towards the far end of the corridor.

"Don't let me disturb you, sir," said the doctor, cheerfully, as they met. "I have nothing to say to Mrs. Armadale but what you or anybody may hear."

Mr. Bashwood went on, without answering, to the far end of the corridor, still repeating to himself, "It will end to-night!" The doctor passing him in the opposite direction, joined Miss Gwilt.

"You have heard, no doubt," he began in his blandest manner and his roundest tones, "that Mr. Armadale has arrived. Permit me to add, my dear lady, that there is not the least reason for any nervous agitation on your part. He has been carefully humoured, and he is as quiet and manage-

able as his best friends could wish. I have informed him that it is impossible to allow him an interview with the young lady to-night—but that he may count on seeing her (with the proper precautions) at the earliest propitious hour, after she is awake to-morrow morning. As there is no hotel near, and as the propitious hour may occur at a moment's notice, it was clearly incumbent on me, under the peculiar circumstances, to offer him the hospitality of the sanatorium. He has accepted it with the utmost gratitude; and has thanked me in a most gentlemanly and touching manner for the pains I have taken to set his mind at ease. Perfectly gratifying, perfectly satisfactory, so far! But there has been a little hitch—now happily got over—which I think it right to mention to you before we all retire for the night."

Having paved the way in those words (and in Mr. Bashwood's hearing) for the statement which he had previously announced his intention of making, in the event of Allan's dying in the sanatorium, the doctor was about to proceed, when his attention was attracted by a sound below like the trying of a door.

He instantly descended the stairs, and unlocked the door of communication between the first and second floors, which he had locked behind him on his way up. But the person who had tried the door—if such a person there really had been—was too quick for him. He looked along the corridor, and over the staircase into the hall, and discovering nothing, returned to Miss Gwilt, after securing the door of communication behind him once more.

"Pardon me," he resumed, "I thought I heard something downstairs. With regard to the little hitch that I adverted to just now, permit me to inform you that Mr. Armadale has brought a friend here with him, who bears the strange name of Midwinter. Do you know this gentleman at all?" asked the doctor, with a suspicious anxiety in his eyes, which strangely belied the elaborate indifference of his tone.

"I know him to be an old friend of Mr. Armadale's," she said. "Does he—?" Her voice failed her, and her eyes fell before the doctor's steady scrutiny. She mastered the momentary weakness, and finished her question. "Does he, too, stay here to-night?"

"Mr. Midwinter is a person of coarse manners and suspicious temper," rejoined the doctor, steadily watching her.

"He was rude enough to insist on staying here as soon as Mr. Armadale had accepted my invitation."

He paused to note the effect of those words on her. Left utterly in the dark by the caution with which she had avoided mentioning her husband's assumed name to him at their first interview, the doctor's distrust of her was necessarily of the vaguest kind. He had heard her voice fail her—he had seen her colour change. He suspected her of a mental reservation on the subject of Midwinter—and of nothing more.

"Did you permit him to have his way?" she asked. "In your place, I should have shown him the door."

The impenetrable composure of her tone warned the doctor that her self-command was not to be further shaken that night. He resumed the character of Mrs. Armadale's medical referee on the subject of Mr. Armadale's mental health.

"If I had only had my own feelings to consult," he said, "I don't disguise from you that I should (as you say) have shown Mr. Midwinter the door. But on appealing to Mr. Armadale, I found he was himself anxious not to be parted from his friend. Under those circumstances, but one alternative was left, the alternative of humouring him again. The responsibility of thwarting him—to say nothing," added the doctor, drifting for a moment towards the truth, "of my natural apprehension, with such a temper as his friend's, of a scandal and disturbance in the house—was not to be thought of for a moment. Mr. Midwinter accordingly remains here for the night; and occupies (I ought to say, insists on occupying) the next room to Mr. Armadale. Advise me, my dear madam, in this emergency," concluded the doctor, with his loudest emphasis. "What rooms shall we put them in, on the first floor?"

"Put Mr. Armadale in Number Four."

"And his friend next to him, in number three?" said the doctor. "Well! well! well! perhaps they *are* the most comfortable rooms. I'll give my orders immediately. Don't hurry away, Mr. Bashwood," he called out cheerfully as he reached the top of the staircase. "I have left the assistant-physician's key on the window-sill yonder, and Mrs. Armadale can let you out at the staircase door whenever she pleases. Don't sit up late, Mrs. Armadale! Yours is a nervous system that requires plenty of sleep. 'Tired nature's

sweet restorer, balmy sleep.' Grand line! God bless you—good-night!"

Mr. Bashwood came back from the far end of the corridor—still pondering, in unutterable expectation, on what was to come with the night.

"Am I to go now?" he asked.

"No. You are to stay. I said you should know all if you waited till the morning. Wait here."

He hesitated and looked about him. "The doctor," he faltered. "I thought the doctor said——"

"The doctor will interfere with nothing that I do in this house to-night. I tell you to stay. There are empty rooms on the floor above this. Take one of them."

Mr. Bashwood felt the trembling fit coming on him again as he looked at her. "May I ask——?" he began.

"Ask nothing. I want you."

"Will you please to tell me——?"

"I will tell you nothing till the night is over and the morning has come."

His curiosity conquered his fear. He persisted.

"Is it something dreadful?" he whispered. "Too dreadful to tell me?"

She stamped her foot with a sudden outbreak of impatience. "Go!" she said, snatching the key of the staircase door from the window-sill. "You do quite right to distrust me—you do quite right to follow me no farther in the dark. Go before the house is shut up. I can do without you." She led the way to the stairs, with the key in one hand, and the candle in the other.

She put the key in the door, and turned to him before she opened it, with the light of the candle on her face. "Forget me, and forgive me," she said. "We meet no more."

She opened the door, and standing inside it, after he had passed her, gave him her hand. He had resisted her look, he had resisted her words, but the magnetic fascination of her touch conquered him at the final moment. "I can't leave you!" he said, holding helplessly by the hand she had given him. "What must I do?"

"Come and see," she answered, without allowing him an instant to reflect.

Closing her hand firmly on his, she led him along the first-floor corridor to the room numbered Four. "Notice that room," she whispered. After a look over the stairs to see that they were alone, she retraced her steps with him to the opposite extremity of the corridor. Here, facing the window which lit the place at the other end, was one little room, with a narrow grating in the higher part of the door, intended for the sleeping-apartment of the doctor's deputy. From the position of this room, the grating commanded a view of the bed-chambers down each side of the corridor, and so enabled the deputy-physician to inform himself of any irregular proceedings on the part of the patients under his care, with little or no chance of being detected in watching them. Miss Gwilt opened the door and led the way into the empty room.

"Wait here," she said, "while I go back upstairs; and lock yourself in, if you like. You will be in the dark—but the gas will be burning in the corridor. Keep at the grating, and make sure that Mr. Armadale goes into the room I have just pointed out to you, and that he doesn't leave it afterwards. If you lose sight of the room for a single moment, before I come back, you will repent it to the end of your life. If you do as I tell you, you shall see me to-morrow, and claim your own reward. Quick with your answer! Is it Yes or No?"

He could make no reply in words. He raised her hand to his lips, and kissed it rapturously. She left him in the room. From his place at the grating he saw her glide down the corridor to the staircase door. She passed through it, and locked it. Then there was silence.

The next sound was the sound of the women-servants' voices. Two of them came up to put the sheets on the beds in Number Three and Number Four. The women were in high good-humour, laughing and talking to each other through the open doors of the rooms. The master's customers were coming in at last, they said, with a vengeance; the house would soon begin to look cheerful, if things went on like this.

After a little, the beds were got ready, and the women returned to the kitchen-floor, on which the sleeping-rooms of the domestic servants were all situated. Then there was silence again.

The next sound was the sound of the doctor's voice. He appeared at the end of the corridor, showing Allan and Midwinter the way to their rooms. They all went together into

Number Four. After a little, the doctor came out first. He waited till Midwinter joined him, and pointed with a formal bow to the door of Number Three. Midwinter entered the room without speaking, and shut himself in. The doctor, left alone, withdrew to the staircase door and unlocked it—then waited in the corridor, whistling to himself softly, under his breath.

Voices pitched cautiously low became audible in a minute more in the hall. The Resident Dispenser and the Head Nurse appeared, on their way to the Dormitories of the Attendants at the top of the house. The man bowed silently, and passed the doctor; the woman curtseyed silently, and followed the man. The doctor acknowledged their salutations by a courteous wave of his hand; and once more left alone, paused a moment, still whistling softly to himself—then walked to the door of Number Four, and opened the case of the fumigating apparatus fixed near it in the corner of the wall. As he lifted the lid and looked in, his whistling ceased. He took a long purple bottle out, examined it by the gaslight, put it back, and closed the case. This done, he advanced on tiptoe to the open staircase door—passed through it—and secured it on the inner side as usual.

Mr. Bashwood had seen him at the apparatus; Mr. Bashwood had noticed the manner of his withdrawal through the staircase-door. Again the sense of an unutterable expectation throbbed at his heart. A terror that was slow and cold and deadly crept into his hands, and guided them in the dark to the key that had been left for him in the inner side of the door. He turned it in vague distrust of what might happen next, and waited.

The slow minutes passed, and nothing happened. The silence was horrible; the solitude of the lonely corridor was a solitude of invisible treacheries. He began to count to keep his mind employed—to keep his own growing dread away from him. The numbers, as he whispered them, followed each other slowly up to a hundred, and still nothing happened. He had begun the second hundred; he had got on to twenty—when, without a sound to betray that he had been moving in his room, Midwinter suddenly appeared in the corridor.

He stood for a moment and listened—he went to the stairs and looked over into the hall beneath. Then, for the second time that night, he tried the staircase door, and for the second

time found it fast. After a moment's reflection, he tried the doors of the bedrooms on his right hand next, looked into one after the other, and saw that they were empty, then came to the door of the end room in which the steward was concealed. Here again, the lock resisted him. He listened, and looked up at the grating. No sound was to be heard, no light was to be seen inside. "Shall I break the door in," he said to himself, "and make sure? No; it would be giving the doctor an excuse for turning me out of the house." He moved away, and looked into the two empty rooms in the row occupied by Allan and himself, then walked to the window at the staircase end of the corridor. Here, the case of the fumigating apparatus attracted his attention. After trying vainly to open it, his suspicion seemed to be aroused. He searched back along the corridor, and observed that no object of a similar kind appeared outside any of the other bedchambers. Again at the window, he looked again at the apparatus, and turned away from it with a gesture which plainly indicated that he had tried, and failed, to guess what it might be.

Baffled at all points, he still showed no sign of returning to his bedchamber. He stood at the window, with his eyes fixed on the door of Allan's room, thinking. If Mr. Bashwood, furtively watching him through the grating, could have seen him at that moment in the mind as well as in the body, Mr. Bashwood's heart might have throbbed even faster than it was throbbing now, in expectation of the next event which Midwinter's decision of the next minute was to bring forth.

On what was his mind occupied as he stood alone, at the dead of night, in the strange house?

His mind was occupied in drawing its disconnected impressions together, little by little, to one point. Convinced, from the first, that some hidden danger threatened Allan in the sanatorium, his distrust—vaguely associated, thus far, with the place itself; with his wife (whom he firmly believed to be now under the same roof with him); with the doctor, who was as plainly in her confidence as Mr. Bashwood himself—now narrowed its range, and centred itself obstinately in Allan's room. Resigning all further effort to connect his suspicion of a conspiracy against his friend, with the outrage which had the day before been offered to himself—an effort which would have led him, if he could have maintained it, to a discovery of the fraud really contemplated by his wife—his mind,

clouded and confused by disturbing influences, instinctively took refuge in its impressions of facts as they had shown themselves, since he had entered the house. Everything that he had noticed below stairs suggested that there was some secret purpose to be answered by getting Allan to sleep in the sanatorium. Everything that he had noticed above stairs, associated the lurking-place in which the danger lay hid, with Allan's room. To reach this conclusion, and to decide on baffling the conspiracy, whatever it might be, by taking Allan's place, was with Midwinter the work of an instant. Confronted by actual peril, the great nature of the man intuitively freed itself from the weaknesses that had beset it in happier and safer times. Not even the shadow of the old superstition rested on his mind now—no fatalist suspicion of himself disturbed the steady resolution that was in him. The one last doubt that troubled him, as he stood at the window thinking, was the doubt whether he could persuade Allan to change rooms with him, without involving himself in an explanation which might lead Allan to suspect the truth.

In the minute that elapsed, while he waited with his eyes on the room, the doubt was resolved—he found the trivial, yet sufficient, excuse of which he was in search. Mr. Bashwood saw him rouse himself, and go to the door. Mr. Bashwood heard him knock softly, and whisper, "Allan, are you in bed?"

"No," answered the voice inside, "come in."

He appeared to be on the point of entering the room, when he checked himself as if he had suddenly remembered something. "Wait a minute," he said, through the door, and, turning away, went straight to the end room. "If there is anybody watching us in there," he said aloud, "let him watch us through this!" He took out his handkerchief, and stuffed it into the wires of the grating, so as completely to close the aperture. Having thus forced the spy inside (if there was one) either to betray himself by moving the handkerchief, or to remain blinded to all view of what might happen next, Midwinter presented himself in Allan's room.

"You know what poor nerves I have," he said, "and what a wretched sleeper I am at the best of times. I can't sleep to-night. The window in my room rattles every time the wind blows. I wish it was as fast as your window here."

"My dear fellow!" cried Allan, "I don't mind a rattling

window. Let's change rooms. Nonsense! Why should you make excuses to *me*? Don't I know how easily trifles upset those excitable nerves of yours? Now the doctor has quieted my mind about my poor little Neelie, I begin to feel the journey—and I'll answer for sleeping anywhere till to-morrow comes." He took up his travelling-bag. "We must be quick about it," he added, pointing to the candle. "They haven't left me much candle to go to bed by."

"Be very quiet, Allan," said Midwinter, opening the door for him. "We mustn't disturb the house at this time of night."

"Yes, yes," returned Allan, in a whisper. "Good-night—I hope you'll sleep as well as I shall."

Midwinter saw him into Number Three, and noticed that his own candle (which he had left there) was as short as Allan's. "Good-night," he said, and came out again into the corridor.

He went straight to the grating, and looked and listened once more. The handkerchief remained exactly as he had left it, and still there was no sound to be heard within. He returned slowly along the corridor, and thought of the precautions he had taken, for the last time. Was there no other way than the way he was trying now? There were none. Any openly-avowed posture of defence—while the nature of the danger, and the quarter from which it might come, were alike unknown—would be useless in itself, and worse than useless in the consequences which it might produce by putting the people of the house on their guard. Without a fact that could justify to other minds his distrust of what might happen with the night; incapable of shaking Allan's ready faith in the fair outside which the doctor had presented to him, the one safeguard in his friend's interests that Midwinter could set up, was the safeguard of changing the rooms—the one policy he could follow, come what might of it, was the policy of waiting for events. "I can trust to one thing," he said to himself, as he looked for the last time up and down the corridor—"I can trust myself to keep awake."

After a glance at the clock on the wall opposite, he went into Number Four. The sound of the closing door was heard, the sound of the turning lock followed it. Then, the dead silence fell over the house once more.

Little by little, the steward's horror of the stillness and the

darkness overcame his dread of moving the handkerchief. He cautiously drew aside one corner of it—waited—looked—and took courage at last to draw the whole handkerchief through the wires of the grating. After first hiding it in his pocket, he thought of the consequences if it was found on him, and threw it down in a corner of the room. He trembled when he had cast it from him, as he looked at his watch, and placed himself again at the grating to wait for Miss Gwilt.

"It was a quarter to one. The moon had come round from the side to the front of the sanatorium. From time to time her light gleamed on the window of the corridor, when the gaps in the flying clouds let it through. The wind had risen, and sung its mournful song faintly, as it swept at intervals over the desert ground in front of the house.

The minute-hand of the clock travelled on half-way round the circle of the dial. As it touched the quarter-past one, Miss Gwilt stepped noiselessly into the corridor. "Let yourself out," she whispered through the grating, "and follow me." She returned to the stairs by which she had just descended; pushed the door to softly, after Mr. Bashwood had followed her; and led the way up to the landing of the second-floor. There she put the question to him which she had not ventured to put below stairs."

"Was Mr. Armadale shown into Number Four?" she asked.

He bowed his head without speaking.

"Answer me in words. Has Mr. Armadale left the room since?"

He answered, "No."

"Have you never lost sight of Number Four since I left you?"

He answered, "*Never.*"

Something strange in his manner, something unfamiliar in his voice, as he made that last reply, attracted her attention. She took her candle from a table near, on which she had left it, and threw its light on him. His eyes were staring, his teeth chattered. There was everything to betray him to her as a terrified man—there was nothing to tell her that the terror was caused by his consciousness of deceiving her, for the first time in his life, to her face. If she had threatened him less openly when she placed him on the watch; if she had spoken less unreservedly of the interview which was to

reward him in the morning, he might have owned the truth. As it was, his strongest fears and his dearest hopes were alike interested in telling her the fatal lie that he had now told—the fatal lie which he reiterated when she put her question for the second time.

She looked at him, deceived by the last man on earth whom she would have suspected of deception—the man whom she had deceived herself.

"You seem to be over-excited," she said quietly. "The night has been too much for you. Go upstairs, and rest. You will find the door of one of the rooms left open. That is the room you are to occupy. Good night."

She put the candle (which she had left burning for him) on the table, and gave him her hand. He held her back by it desperately as she turned to leave him. His horror of what might happen when she was left by herself, forced the words to his lips which he would have feared to speak to her at any other time.

"Don't," he pleaded in a whisper; "oh, don't, don't, don't go downstairs to-night!"

She released her hand, and signed to him to take the candle. "You shall see me to-morrow," she said. "Not a word more now!"

Her stronger will conquered him at that last moment, as it had conquered him throughout. He took the candle, and waited—following her eagerly with his eyes as she descended the stairs. The cold of the December night seemed to have found its way to her through the warmth of the house. She had put on a long heavy black shawl, and had fastened it close over her breast. The plaited coronet in which she wore her hair seemed to have weighed too heavily on her head. She had untwisted it, and thrown it back over her shoulders. The old man looked at her flowing hair, as it lay red over the black shawl—at her supple, long-fingered hand, as it slid down the banisters—at the smooth, seductive grace of every movement that took her farther and farther away from him. "The night will go quickly," he said to himself as she passed from his view; "I shall dream of her till the morning comes!"

She secured the staircase door, after she had passed through it—listened, and satisfied herself that nothing was stirring—then went on slowly along the corridor to the window. Lean-

ing on the window-sill, she looked out at the night. The clouds were over the moon at that moment; nothing was to be seen through the darkness but the scattered gaslights in the suburb. Turning from the window, she looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes past one.

For the last time, the resolution that had come to her in the earlier night, with the knowledge that her husband was in the house, forced itself uppermost in her mind. For the last time, the voice within her said, "Think if there is no other way!"

She pondered over it till the minute-hand of the clock pointed to the half-hour. "No!" she said, still thinking of the husband. "The one chance left, is to go through with it to the end. He will leave the thing undone which he has come here to do; he will leave the words unspoken which he has come here to say—when he knows that the act may make me a public scandal, and that the words may send me to the scaffold!" Her colour rose, and she smiled with a terrible irony as she looked for the first time at the door of the Room. "I shall be your widow," she said, "in half-an-hour!"

She opened the case of the apparatus, and took the Purple Flask in her hand. After marking the time by a glance at the clock, she dropped into the glass funnel the first of the six separate Pourings that were measured for her by the paper slips.

When she had put the Flask back, she listened at the mouth of the funnel. Not a sound reached her ear: the deadly process did its work, in the silence of death itself. When she rose, and looked up, the moon was shining in at the window, and the moaning wind was quiet.

Oh, the time! the time! If it could only have been begun and ended with the first Pouring!

She went downstairs into the hall—she walked to and fro, and listened at the open door that led to the kitchen stairs. She came up again; she went down again. The first of the intervals of five minutes was endless. The time stood still. The suspense was maddening.

The interval passed. As she took the Flask for the second time, and dropped in the second Pouring, the clouds floated over the moon, and the night-view through the window slowly darkened.

The restlessness that had driven her up and down the stairs, and backwards and forwards in the hall, left her as suddenly as it had come. She waited through the second interval, leaning on the window-sill, and staring, without conscious thought of any kind, into the black night. The howling of a belated dog was borne towards her on the wind, at intervals, from some distant part of the suburb. She found herself following the faint sound as it died away into silence with a dull attention, and listening for its coming again with an expectation that was duller still. Her arms lay like lead on the window-sill; her forehead rested against the glass without feeling the cold. It was not till the moon struggled out again that she was startled into sudden self-remembrance. She turned quickly, and looked at the clock; seven minutes had passed since the second Pouring.

As she snatched up the Flask, and fed the funnel for the third time, the full consciousness of her position came back to her. The fever-heat throbbed again in her blood, and flushed fiercely in her cheeks. Swift, smooth, and noiseless, she paced from end to end of the corridor, with her arms folded in her shawl, and her eye moment after moment on the clock.

Three out of the next five minutes passed, and again the suspense began to madden her. The space in the corridor grew too confined for the illimitable restlessness that possessed her limbs. She went down into the hall again, and circled round and round it like a wild creature in a cage. At the third turn, she felt something moving softly against her dress. The house-cat had come up through the open kitchen-door—a large, tawny, companionable cat that purred in high good temper, and followed her for company. She took the animal up in her arms—it rubbed its sleek head luxuriously against her chin as she bent her face over it. "Armadale hates cats," she whispered in the creature's ear. "Come up and see Armadale killed!" The next moment her own frightful fancy horrified her. She dropped the cat with a shudder; she drove it below again with threatening hands. For a moment after, she stood still—then, in headlong haste, suddenly mounted the stairs. Her husband had forced his way back again into her thoughts; her husband threatened her with a danger which had never entered her mind till now. What, if he were not asleep? What if he came out upon her and found her with the Purple Flask in her hand?

She stole to the door of number three, and listened. The slow, regular breathing of a sleeping man was just audible. After waiting a moment to let the feeling of relief quiet her, she took a step towards Number Four—and checked herself. It was needless to listen at *that* door. The doctor had told her that Sleep came first, as certainly as Death afterwards, in the poisoned air. She looked aside at the clock. The time had come for the fourth Pouring.

Her hand began to tremble violently as she fed the funnel for the fourth time. The fear of her husband was back again in her heart. What if some noise disturbed him before the sixth Pouring? What if he woke on a sudden (as she had often seen him wake) without any noise at all?

She looked up and down the corridor. The end room, in which Mr. Bashwood had been concealed, offered itself to her as a place of refuge. "I might go in there!" she thought. "Has he left the key?" She opened the door to look, and saw the handkerchief thrown down on the floor. Was it Mr. Bashwood's handkerchief, left there by accident? She examined it at the corners. In the second corner she found her husband's name!

Her first impulse hurried her to the staircase-door, to rouse the steward, and insist on an explanation. The next moment, she remembered the Purple Flask, and the danger of leaving the corridor. She turned, and looked at the door of number three. Her husband, on the evidence of the handkerchief, had unquestionably been out of his room—and Mr. Bashwood had not told her. Was he in his room now? In the violence of her agitation, as the question passed through her mind, she forgot the discovery which she had herself made not a minute before. Again, she listened at the door; again, she heard the slow regular breathing of the sleeping man. The first time, the evidence of her ears had been enough to quiet her. *This* time, in the tenfold aggravation of her suspicion and her alarm, she was determined to have the evidence of her eyes as well. "All the doors open softly in this house," she said to herself; "there's no fear of my waking him." Noiselessly, by an inch at a time, she opened the unlocked door, and looked in the moment the aperture was wide enough. In the little light she had let into the room, the sleeper's head was just visible on the pillow. Was it quite as dark against the white pillow as her husband's head looked

when he was in bed? Was the breathing as light as her husband's breathing when he was asleep?

She opened the door more widely, and looked in by the clearer light.

There lay the man whose life she had attempted for the third time, peacefully sleeping in the room that had been given to her husband, and in the air that could harm nobody!

The inevitable conclusion overwhelmed her on the instant. With a frantic upward action of her hands she staggered back into the passage. The door of Allan's room fell to—but not noisily enough to wake him. She turned as she heard it close. For one moment she stood staring at it like a woman stupefied. The next, her instinct rushed into action, before her reason recovered itself. In two steps she was at the door of Number Four.

The door was locked.

She felt over the wall with both hands, wildly and clumsily, for the button which she had seen the doctor press, when he was showing the room to the visitors. Twice she missed it. The third time her eyes helped her hands—she found the button and pressed on it. The mortice of the lock inside fell back, and the door yielded to her.

Without an instant's hesitation she entered the room. Though the door was open—though so short a time had elapsed since the fourth Pouring, that but little more than half the contemplated volume of gas had been produced as yet—the poisoned air seized her, like the grasp of a hand at her throat, like the twisting of a wire round her head. She found him on the floor at the foot of the bed—his head and one arm were towards the door, as if he had risen under the first feeling of drowsiness, and had sunk in the effort to leave the room. With the desperate concentration of strength of which women are capable in emergencies, she lifted him and dragged him out into the corridor. Her brain reeled as she laid him down and crawled back on her knees to the room, to shut out the poisoned air from pursuing them into the passage. After closing the door, she waited, without daring to look at him the while, for strength enough to rise and get to the window over the stairs. When the window was opened, when the keen air of the early winter morning blew steadily in, she ventured back to him and raised his head, and looked for the first time closely at his face.

Was it death that spread the livid pallor over his forehead and his cheeks, and the dull leaden hue on his eyelids and his lips?

She loosened his cravat and opened his waistcoat, and bared his throat and breast to the air. With her hand on his heart, with her bosom supporting his head, so that he fronted the window, she waited the event. A time passed: a time short enough to be reckoned by minutes on the clock; and yet long enough to take her memory back over all her married life with him—long enough to mature the resolution that now rose in her mind as the one result that could come of the retrospect. As her eyes rested on him, a strange composure settled slowly on her face. She bore the look of a woman who was equally resigned to welcome the chance of his recovery, or to accept the certainty of his death.

Not a cry or a tear had escaped her yet. Not a cry or a tear escaped her when the interval had passed, and she felt the first faint fluttering of his heart, and heard the first faint catching of the breath at his lips. She silently bent over him and kissed his forehead. When she looked up again, the hard despair had melted from her face. There was something softly radiant in her eyes, which lit her whole countenance as with an inner light, and made her womanly and lovely once more.

She laid him down, and, taking off her shawl, made a pillow of it to support his head. "It might have been hard, love," she said, as she felt the faint pulsation strengthening at his heart. "You have made it easy now."

She rose, and, turning from him, noticed the Purple Flask in the place where she had left it since the fourth Pouring. "Ah," she thought quietly, "I had forgotten my best friend—I had forgotten that there is more to pour in yet."

With a steady hand, with a calm, attentive face, she fed the funnel for the fifth time. "Five minutes more," she said, when she had put the Flask back, after a look at the clock.

She fell into thought—thought that only deepened the grave and gentle composure of her face. "Shall I write him a farewell word?" she asked herself. "Shall I tell him the truth before I leave him for ever?"

Her little gold pencil-case hung with the other toys at her watch-chain. After looking about her for a moment, she knelt over her husband and put her hand into the breast-pocket of his coat.

His pocket-book was there. Some papers fell from it as she unfastened the clasp. One of them was the letter which had come to him from Mr. Brock's deathbed. She turned over the two sheets of notepaper on which the rector had written the words that had now come true—and found the last page of the last sheet a blank. On that page she wrote her farewell words, kneeling at her husband's side.

"I am worse than the worst you can think of me. You have saved Armadale by changing rooms with him to-night—and you have saved him from Me. You can guess now whose widow I should have claimed to be, if you had not preserved his life; and you will know what a wretch you married when you married the woman who writes these lines. Still, I had some innocent moments—and then I loved you dearly. Forget me, my darling, in the love of a better woman than I am. I might, perhaps, have been that better woman myself, if I had not lived a miserable life before you met with me. It matters little now. The one atonement I can make for all the wrong I have done you is the atonement of my death. It is not hard for me to die, now I know you will live. Even my wickedness has one merit—it has not prospered. I have never been a happy woman."

She folded the letter again, and put it into his hand, to attract his attention in that way when he came to himself. As she gently closed his fingers on the paper and looked up, the last minute of the last interval faced her, recorded on the clock.

She bent over him, and gave him her farewell kiss.

"Live, my angel, live!" she murmured tenderly, with her lips just touching his. "All your life is before you—a happy life, and an honoured life if you are freed from *me*!"

With a last, lingering tenderness, she parted the hair back from his forehead. "It is no merit to have loved you," she said. "You are one of the men whom women all like. She sighed and left him. It was her last weakness. She bent her head affirmatively to the clock, as if it had been a living creature speaking to her—and fed the funnel for the last time, to the last drop left in the Flask.

The waning moon shone in faintly at the window. With her hand on the door of the room, she turned and looked at the light that was slowly fading out of the murky sky.

"Oh, God, forgive me!" she said. "Oh, Christ, bear witness that I have suffered!"

One moment more she lingered on the threshold; lingered for her last look in this world—and turned that look on *him*.

"Good-bye!" she said softly.

The door of the room opened—and closed on her. There was an interval of silence.

Then, a sound came dull and sudden, like the sound of a fall.

Then, there was silence again.

. . . . . .

The hands of the clock, following their steady course, reckoned the minutes of the morning as one by one they lapsed away. It was the tenth minute since the door of the room had opened and closed, before Midwinter stirred on his pillow, and, struggling to raise himself, felt the letter in his hand.

At the same moment, a key was turned in the staircase-door. And the doctor, looking expectantly towards the fatal room, saw the Purple Flask on the window-sill, and the prostrate man trying to raise himself from the floor.

THE END OF THE LAST BOOK

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER I

NEWS FROM NORFOLK

From Mr. Pedgift Senior (Thorpe-Ambrose) to Mr. Pedgift Junior (Paris)

"High Street, December 20th.

"MY DEAR AUGUSTUS—Your letter reached me yesterday. You seem to be making the most of your youth (as you call it) with a vengeance. Well! enjoy your holiday. I made the most of my youth, when I was your age; and, wonderful to relate, I haven't forgotten it yet!

"You ask me for a good budget of news, and especially, for more information about that mysterious business at the Sanatorium.

"Curiosity, my dear boy, is a quality which (in our profession especially) sometimes leads to great results. I doubt, however, if you will find it leading to much on this occasion. All I know of the mystery at the Sanatorium, I know from Mr. Armadale; and he is entirely in the dark on more than one point of importance. I have already told you how they were entrapped into the house, and how they passed the night there. To this I can now add that something did certainly happen to Mr. Midwinter, which deprived him of consciousness; and that the doctor, who appears to have been mixed up in the matter, carried things with a high hand, and insisted on taking his own course in his own Sanatorium. There is not the least doubt that the miserable woman (however she might have come by her death) was found dead—that a coroner's inquest inquired into the circumstances—that the evidence showed her to have entered the house as a patient—and that the medical investigation ended in discovering that she had died of apoplexy. My idea is, that Mr. Midwinter had a motive of his own for not coming forward with the evidence that he might have given. I have also reason to suspect that Mr. Armadale, out of regard for him, followed his

lead, and that the verdict at the inquest (attaching no blame to anybody), proceeded, like many other verdicts of the same kind, from an entirely superficial investigation of the circumstances.

The key to the whole mystery is to be found, I firmly believe, in that wretched woman's attempt to personate the character of Mr. Armadale's widow, when the news of his death appeared in the papers. But what first set her on this, and by what inconceivable process of deception, she can have induced Mr. Midwinter to marry her (as the certificate proves) under Mr. Armadale's name, is more than Mr. Armadale himself knows. The point was not touched at the inquest, for the simple reason that the inquest only concerned itself with the circumstances attending her death. Mr. Armadale, at his friend's request, saw Miss Blanchard, and induced her to silence old Darch on the subject of the claim that had been made relating to the widow's income. As the claim had never been admitted, even our stiff-necked brother practitioner consented for once to do as he was asked. The doctor's statement that his patient was the widow of a gentleman named Armadale, was accordingly left unchallenged, and so the matter has been hushed up. She is buried in the great cemetery, near the place where she died. Nobody but Mr. Midwinter and Mr. Armadale (who insisted on going with him), followed her to the grave; and nothing has been inscribed on the tombstone, but the initial letter of her Christian name, and the date of her death. So, after all the harm she has done, she rests at last—and so the two men whom she has injured have forgiven her.

"Is there more to say on this subject before we leave it? On referring to your letter, I find you have raised one other point, which may be worth a moment's notice.

"You ask if there is reason to suppose that the doctor comes out of the matter with hands which are really as clean as they look? My dear Augustus, I believe the doctor to have been at the bottom of more of this mischief than we shall ever find out; and to have profited by the self-imposed silence of Mr. Midwinter and Mr. Armadale, as rogues perpetually profit by the misfortunes and necessities of honest men. It is an ascertained fact that he connived at the false statement about Miss Milroy, which entrapped the two gentlemen into his house—and that one circumstance (after my Old Bailey

experience) is enough for *me*. As to evidence against him, there is not a jot—and as to Retribution overtaking him, I can only say I heartily hope Retribution may prove in the long run to be the more cunning customer of the two. There is not much prospect of it at present. The doctor's friends and admirers are, I understand, about to present him with a Testimonial, 'expressive of their sympathy under the sad occurrence which has thrown a cloud over the opening of his Sanatorium, and of their undiminished confidence in his integrity and ability as a medical man.' We live, Augustus, in an age eminently favourable to the growth of all roguery which is careful enough to keep up appearances. In this enlightened nineteenth century, I look upon the doctor as one of our rising men.

"To turn now to pleasanter subjects than sanatoriums, I may tell you that Miss Neelie is as good as well again, and is, in my humble opinion, prettier than ever. She is staying in London, under the care of a female relative—and Mr. Armadale satisfies her of the fact of his existence (in case she should forget it) regularly every day. They are to be married in the spring—unless Mrs. Milroy's death causes the ceremony to be postponed. The medical men are of opinion that the poor lady is sinking at last. It may be a question of weeks or a question of months, they can say no more. She is greatly altered—quiet and gentle, and anxiously affectionate with her husband and her child. But, in her case, this happy change is, it seems, a sign of approaching dissolution, from the medical point of view. There is a difficulty in making the poor old major understand this. He only sees that she has gone back to the likeness of her better self when he first married her; and he sits for hours by her bedside now, and tells her about his wonderful clock.

"Mr. Midwinter, of whom you will next expect me to say something, is improving rapidly. After causing some anxiety at first to the medical men (who declared that he was suffering from a serious nervous shock, produced by circumstances about which their patient's obstinate silence kept them quite in the dark), he has rallied, as only men of his sensitive temperament (to quote the doctors again) *can* rally. He and Mr. Armadale are together in a quiet lodging. I saw him last week, when I was in London. His face showed signs of wear and tear, very sad to see in so young a man. But he spoke

of himself and his future with a courage and hopefulness, which men of twice his years (if he has suffered, as I suspect him to have suffered) might have envied. If I know anything of humanity this is no common man—and we shall hear of him yet in no common way.

"You will wonder how I came to be in London. I went up, with a return ticket (from Saturday to Monday) about that matter in dispute at our agent's. We had a tough fight—but, curiously enough, a point occurred to me just as I got up to go; and I went back to my chair, and settled the question in no time. Of course I stayed at Our Hotel in Covent Garden. William, the waiter, asked after you with the affection of a father; and Matilda, the chambermaid, said you almost persuaded her, that last time, to have the hollow tooth taken out of her lower jaw. I had the agent's second son (the young chap you nicknamed Mustapha, when he made that dreadful mess about the Turkish Securities) to dine with me on Sunday. A little incident happened in the evening which may be worth recording, as it connected itself with a certain old lady, who was not 'at home' when you and Mr. Armadale blundered on that house in Pimlico in the bygone time.

"Mustapha was like all the rest of you young men of the present day—he got restless after dinner. 'Let's go to a public amusement, Mr. Pedgift,' says he. 'Public amusement? Why, it's Sunday evening!' says I. 'All right, sir,' says Mustapha. 'They stop acting on the stage, I grant you, on Sunday evening—but they don't stop acting in the pulpit. Come and see the last new Sunday performer of our time.' As he wouldn't have any more wine, there was nothing else for it, but to go.

"We went to a street at the West End, and found it blocked up with carriages. If it hadn't been Sunday night, I should have thought we were going to the opera. 'What did I tell you?' says Mustapha, taking me up to an open door with a gas star outside and a bill of the performance. I had just time to notice that I was going to one of a series of 'Sunday Evening Discourses on the Pomps and Vanities of the World, by A Sinner Who Has Served Them,' when Mustapha jogged my elbow, and whispered, 'Half-a-crown is the fashionable tip.' I found myself between two demure and silent gentlemen, with plates in their hands, uncommonly well-filled

already with the fashionable tip. Mustapha patronised one plate, I the other. We passed through two doors into a long room, crammed with people. And there, on a platform at the farther end holding forth to the audience, was—not a man as I had expected—but a Woman, and that woman, MOTHER OLDERSHAW! You never listened to anything more eloquent in your life. As long as I heard her she was never once at a loss for a word anywhere. I shall think less of oratory as a human accomplishment, for the rest of my days, after that Sunday evening. As for the matter of the sermon, I may describe it as a narrative of Mrs. Oldershaw's experience among dilapidated women, profusely illustrated in the pious and penitential style. You will ask what sort of audience it was. Principally women, Augustus—and, as I hope to be saved, all the old harridans of the world of fashion, whom Mother Oldershaw had enamelled in her time, sitting boldly in the front places, with their cheeks ruddled with paint, in a state of devout enjoyment wonderful to see! I left Mustapha to hear the end of it. And I thought to myself, as I went out, of what Shakespeare says somewhere—'Lord, what fools we mortals be!'

"Have I anything more to tell you before I leave off? Only one thing that I can remember.

"That wretched old Bashwood has confirmed the fears I told you I had about him, when he was brought back here from London. There is no kind of doubt that he has really lost all the little reason he ever had. He is perfectly harmless, and perfectly happy. And he would do very well, if we could only prevent him from going out in his last new suit of clothes, smirking and smiling, and inviting everybody to his approaching marriage with the handsomest woman in England. It ends of course in the boys pelting him, and in his coming here crying to me, covered with mud. The moment his clothes are cleaned again, he falls back into his favourite delusion, and struts about before the church gates, in the character of a bridegroom, waiting for Miss Gwilt. We must get the poor wretch taken care of somewhere for the rest of the little time he has to live. Who would ever have thought of a man at his age falling in love? and who would ever have believed that the mischief that woman's beauty has done, could have reached as far in the downward direction as our superannuated old clerk?

"Good-bye, for the present, my dear boy. If you see a particularly handsome snuff-box in Paris, remember—though your father scorns Testimonials—he doesn't object to receive a present from his son.

Yours affectionately,
A. PEDGIFT, SENR.

"POSTSCRIPT.—I think it likely that the account you mention, in the French papers, of a fatal quarrel among some foreign sailors in one of the Lipari Islands, and of the death of their captain, among others, may really have been a quarrel among the scoundrels who robbed Mr. Armadale, and scuttled his yacht. *Those* fellows, luckily for society, can't always keep up appearances; and, in their case, Rogues and Retribution do occasionally come into collision with each other."

CHAPTER II

MIDWINTER

The spring had advanced to the end of April. It was the eve of Allan's wedding-day. Midwinter and he had sat talking together at the great house till far into the night—till so far that it had struck twelve long since, and the wedding-day was already some hours old.

For the most part, the conversation had turned on the bridegroom's plans and projects. It was not till the two friends rose to go to rest, that Allan insisted on making Midwinter speak of himself. "We have had enough. and more than enough, of *my* future," he began, in his bluntly straightforward way. "Let's say something now, Midwinter, about yours. You have promised me, I know, that if you take to Literature, it shan't part us, and that if you go on a sea voyage, you will remember when you come back that my house is your home. But this is the last chance we have of being together in our old way; and I own I should like to know——" His voice faltered, and his eyes moistened a little. He left the sentence unfinished.

Midwinter took his hand and helped him, as he had often helped him to the words that he wanted, in the bygone time.

"You would like to know, Allan," he said, "that I sha not bring an aching heart with me to your wedding-day? you will let me go back for a moment to the past, I think can satisfy you."

They took their chairs again. Allan saw that Midwinter was moved. "Why distress yourself?" he asked kindly — "why go back to the past?"

"For two reasons, Allan. I ought to have thanked you long since for the silence you have observed, for my sake on a matter that must have seemed very strange to you. You know what the name is which appears on the register o my marriage—and yet you have forborne to speak of it, fron the fear of distressing me. Before you enter on your nev life, let us come to a first and last understanding about this I ask you—as one more kindness to me—to accept my assur ance (strange as the thing must seem to you) that I am blameless in this matter; and I entreat you to believe that the reasons I have for leaving it unexplained, are reasons which, if Mr. Brock was living, Mr. Brock himself would approve." In those words, he kept the secret of the two names—and left the memory of Allan's mother, what he had found it, a sacred memory in the heart of her son.

"One word more," he went on—"a word which will take us, this time, from past to future. It has been said, ano truly said, that out of Evil may come Good. Out of the horror and the misery of that night you know of, has come the silencing of a doubt which once made my life miserable with groundless anxiety about you and about myself. No clouds, raised by my superstition, will ever come between us again. I can't honestly tell you that I am more willing now than I was when we were in the Isle of Man, to take what is called the rational view of your Dream. Though I know what extraordinary coincidences are perpetually happening in the experience of all of us, still I cannot accep coincidences as explaining the fulfilment of the Visions which our own eyes have seen. All I can sincerely say for myself is, what I think it will satisfy you to know, that I have learn to view the purpose of the Dream with a new mind. I once believed that it was sent to rouse your distrust of the friendless man whom you had taken as a brother to your heart. I now *know* that it came to you as a timely warning to take him closer still. Does this help to satisfy you that

I, too, am standing hopefully on the brink of a new life, and that while we live, brother, your love and mine will never be divided again?"

They shook hands in silence. Allan was the first to recover himself. He answered in the few words of kindly assurance which were the best words that he could address to his friend.

"I have heard all I ever want to hear about the past," he said; "and I know what I most wanted to know about the future. Everybody says, Midwinter, you have a career before you—and I believe that everybody is right. Who knows what great things may happen before you and I are many years older?"

"Who *need* know?" said Midwinter, calmly. "Happen what may, God is all-merciful, God is all-wise. In those words, your dear old friend once wrote to me. In that faith, I can look back without murmuring at the years that are past, and can look on without doubting to the years that are to come."

He rose, and walked to the window. While they had been speaking together, the darkness had passed. The first light of the new day met him as he looked out, and rested tenderly on his face.

THE END

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